The AMERICAN REVIEW

VOLUME SEVEN NUMBER TWO

MAY 1936

On Straightening the Dog's Tail

A. J. PENTY

THERE is an ancient Hindu story of a man who went to a great yogi for a formula to raise the devil. The yogi was quite willing to oblige him, but warned him before doing so that once the devil was raised up he must be kept in employment or he would turn and devour him. The man, however, was not to be intimidated, so he took the formula and raised the devil by his incantations; he had plenty of work, and managed for a long time to keep the devil fully occupied. But a time came when work began to run out, and he lived in terror of his destruction at the hands of the unemployed monster. In desperation he went back to the yogi to seek advice. "Well," said the yogi, "I told you what to expect. But do not despair. Take this dog to your devil and tell him to straighten its curly tail. That will keep him busy forever."

This is not exactly the story of industrialism. Our industrial magnates did not seek a formula to raise the devil, but a formula to abolish work, and at the end of the process they have found they have raised the devil. But the end of the story is the same, inasmuch as we live in fear of him, and seek to put off the evil day by providing him with work. But we have not yet discovered any work-finder which promises to be as effective as straightening the dog's tail.

And all this because we worship power, money, and machinery. These three, but the greatest of these is machinery. Since the dawn of history men have worshipped power and money. Power and money have corrupted society and given rise to grave social injustices; but until the advent of machinery man could still find his way about, his social relations continued to be more or less normal, he still retained the sense of his own personality; his image was still the image of God. But this gradually ceases to be true as mechanization takes place; society is churned to pieces. Man loses his way amid the growth of complexity; he loses the sense of reality, of his own personality, until finally his image becomes that of the machine rather than of God.

We talk of power-politics, but we ought to talk of machine-politics, for all modern politics are machine-politics. Those who are out for money and power must pay homage to the machine. They must be its obedient slaves. What are international politics, the foreign policies of all nations, concerned with but to secure new markets in which to dump the surplus products of industrialism and to secure sources of raw materials to satisfy the voracious appetite of the machines we refuse to regulate? This is true of every country in the world, in proportion to the extent each has become involved in industrialism. Why is Italy at war with Abyssinia? Nominally to find an outlet for its surplus population; actually, to find raw materials for its machines and a market for their finished products, since but for machines all might find a living at handicraft. Why is Germany arming and Japan pursuing an imperial policy? For the same reason. And why does France and her allies find it so difficult to meet Germany's demands? Because they are all at the mercy of their machines. Peace is no longer merely a question of goodwill. The governments of all the great powers are at the mercy of economic forces they do not know how to control which owe their existence to the unrestricted use of machinery. Yet no statesman has the courage to affirm such is the case; or is it they are blind to the reality?

And so because of our fatalistic attitude towards machinery we are driven to pile up armaments. It is a development that is not altogether unwelcome to millions of workers, for though the masses in all countries do not want war, they want employment; and as a work-finder rearmament is, in these days, without a rival. The equipment for modern warfare is on so gigantic a scale; battleships, guns, airplanes, tanks, munitions all are made at enormous expense only to be destroyed as rapidly and completely as possible. Work is created on a great scale; the unemployed are all absorbed either into the army or munition factories: the wheels of industry can be speeded up, there is no fear of overproduction when destruction is swift and incessant: in fact it is only in a state of war that our mechanized industries function at their proper intensity. "If nobody else can put them to work," says Death, in a recent cartoon on the unemployed and rearmament, "I will!"

This is the logical climax to which industrialism has been moving from the very beginning. There is a definite connection between industrial development and war. In a recent book Mr. Walton Newbold has pointed out that all the great armament firms came into existence in connection with railway building, and turned to making armaments when railway building came to an end. We know that Bismarck engineered the Franco-Prussian War in order to get possession of the iron-fields of Alsace and Lorraine, so necessary to German industrial development, and that the Great War was intimately connected with the struggle for markets and sources of raw material. German policy today is dictated by the need of finding a remedy for the unemployment machinery has created. In his book *Nazi Germany Explained* Mr. Vernon Bartlett, by a careful comparison of the unemployed figures in Germany with the votes cast for the Nazis in the elections shows that the fluctuating fortunes of the Nazis corresponded with the rise and fall in unemployment. It was not until the full force of the rationalization under the Dawes Plan was felt with its accompanying unemployment that the conditions were created which carried the Nazis into power. The Nazis promised, among other things, to cure unemployment. To some extent they have been successful. They have reduced unemployment from 6,000,000, at which it stood in 1933 when they came into power, to 1,700,000 today. This achievement is mainly due to heavy government expenditure on rearmament. The British workers also prospered during the Great War, when all who were not fighting could find work in munition factories. It is to be surmised the British unemployed will welcome rearmament.

The New Deal in its industrial aspect is another device for straightening the dog's tail. It is a part of the disease. It refuses to face the fact that we are suffering from too much machinery, and that means are out of all proportion to ends. As a result, to quote the music-hall song, we are "all dressed up with no place to go"; but any solution of our problems depends finally on making up our minds where it is desirable to go. The industrial process is so long that we have entirely lost sight of ends; of all sense of social direction. And so, under the New Deal, instead of insisting on the primacy of ends and limiting means, society is carried one stage nearer catastrophe by further developing means, as in the case of building power-stations. The immediate effect of the great expenditure of public money to finance these schemes has been to cause money to circulate again and to create a certain measure of prosperity. The immediate economic effect would have been just the same had the money been spent on non-productive works, say on building cathedrals. But the ultimate result would be very different. For if the money had been spent on building cathedrals the prosperity would remain because the relation between productive power and consuming power would be unchanged. When the money is spent on power-plants the prosperity ceases when the plant is put into operation, because the discrepancy between production and consumption is then greater than before. This is no idle theory. It happened in Germany when the industries were rationalized under the Dawes plan. Germany prospered while the re-equipment was taking place, but the prosperity came to an end when the rationalized industries started producing. For the new machines required fewer men. Between 1926 and 1931 one million workers lost their jobs, while production increased twenty per cent. Three quarters of a million young men came of age who could find no places for themselves. Half of all the men between the ages of sixteen and thirty were permanently unemployed. It was this situation that the Nazis exploited.

One would have thought that any fool could see that the remedy for a state of things in which production had got ahead of consumption was to increase consumption or to decrease production, but certainly not to increase production still further. Yet our politicians and financiers are so obsessed with the idea that trade revivals follow reduction of costs that they remained blind to the real situation.

Throughout the industrial era the policy of reducing costs worked, or appeared to work. As a matter of fact, it never worked, for it was not the reduction of costs that led to trade revivals, but the expenditure of capital on new plant which caused money to circulate. The policy worked so long as the market kept on expanding, but it ceased to work as the markets were filled and centralization became highly developed, which resulted in concentrating purchasing power in the hands of too few people for it to circulate freely. In these circumstances, once this point is reached, nothing short of a redistribution of purchasing power can set the wheels of industry in motion again; but if such a distribution is not to do more harm than good, it will have to be applied gradually, in order to allow industry to adjust itself to the changed demand which would follow the increased spending power of the masses. Otherwise, a free distribution of purchasing power will be followed by inflation and bring about reaction. Further, if this policy is to be finally effective, it will, among other things, have to be accompanied by a greatly increased expenditure on the arts, in order that industry may be directed into its proper channels.

This brings me to the Douglas Scheme, which is finally another device for straightening the dog's tail, for the Douglas Scheme begins by taking the unrestricted use of machinery for granted. As I said in a previous article, I think there is a great deal in the idea of Social Credit interpreted as a free distribution of purchasing power applied empirically as a temporary economic expedient. But I have no use for the Douglas theory with its proposal to use a distribution as a basis for a new mechanized social order. Social Credit associated with a Wellsian philosophy demands for its acceptance that the individual throw overboard his common sense; Douglas asks us to believe that the age-long pattern of human society has no longer any validity, that social salvation is not to come by returning to the normal but by stabilizing the abnormal, on the assumption that the thoughtless application of machinery on a basis of avarice, *plus* the Douglas Scheme, will lead to the Leisure State. But the Leisure State is a mirage. Mechanization does not move to any rational order, but to a vast increase of the irrational, to social hysteria, collective insanity, scientific barbarism, gansterism, class hatreds, national hatreds, militarism, and, I fear, to war, and the destruction of our civilization. It is strange that in spite of these developments people should still continue to believe that salvation will follow surrender to the machine. We are cowed and overawed by industrialism, much as dwellers in tropical latitudes are said to be cowed and overawed by the stupendous nature they see around them.

It should be pointed out that there is no necessary connection between the idea of Social Credit and a Wellsian social philosophy. They were not associated in the mind of the late Victor Branford, the pioneer of Social Credit. On the contrary he envisaged Social Credit as nothing more than a measure of temporary validity to enable society to turn a difficult corner by financing the housing schemes with Treasury Notes. *

It is important at this juncture to recall Branford's proposal, for the Alberta fiasco may result in a reaction against the idea of Social Credit, and it would be a misfortune if what is good in the idea should suffer discredit for what is bad. Social Credit is an idea with implications. But the false social idealism with which the Douglas Scheme is associated has hitherto prevented Douglas and his followers from accepting its implications. One of these implications is that a country must be largely self-sufficient. It is

---

* Branford's ideas on the subject are contained in a pamphlet published by the Sociological Society during the War entitled *The Banker's Part in Social Reconstruction.*

because Douglas ignored this, that his followers in Alberta promised the impossible. As Alberta is anything but self-sufficient, producing only wheat for export, Social Credit touches none of its problems, which would be helped by mixed farming and the fostering of native industries. Yet fate decreed that Social Credit should be first attempted in Alberta.

And now I must safeguard myself against a possible misunderstanding lest I also be accused of exaggeration. I have insisted so often on the connection between machinery and unemployment that it might be supposed that I have overlooked the fact that unemployment existed before the Industrial Revolution. It is necessary therefore to point out that Capitalism as well as industrialism leads to unemployment because of the unequal distribution of purchasing power it also brings into existence. It happened in Greece, it happened in Rome. Alexander the Great, at the suggestion of Isocrates, undertook his campaigns in order to find an outlet for the unemployed which capitalism in Greece left behind as an heritage. And it is open for anyone to ascribe our modern wars entirely to the concentrations of capitalism. It is so difficult to draw the line between the consequences of unregulated money and unregulated machinery. I do not want to make machinery explain everything, as Douglasites seek to make money explain everything, but demand that machinery be given equal causal importance with money. It would be right to explain the problems of machinery entirely in the terms of money if the impulse to mechanization came from financiers or capitalists, instead of from scientists and

57097

inventors, especially the latter; that is, from men who dream about machinery, and as often as not pursue it from entirely disinterested motives. Since apart from the devotion of men of this type, mechanization would never have taken place, for it is common knowledge that capitalists resist improvements in machinery as long as possible. Everybody knows the difficulties patentees have to get capitalists to take up new inventions because of the loss they sustain by a new invention superseding old machinery. Finance is naturally conservative. Because the impulse to mechanization comes from inventors rather than financiers, there is no reason to suppose inventors would give up inventing if a National Dividend were distributed. If therefore machinery is to continue unrestricted, it follows that a National Dividend would increase mechanization and dehumanization by giving inventors a more assured position and security. And I am not alone in thinking such would be the case. The Technocrats evidently think so. They support the Douglas Scheme not because they think it would remove the domination of society by machinery, but because they think it would remove an obstruction in the path of further mechanization.

For these reasons, we must assign to machinery causal importance. Marx saw that while the problem of machinery had part of its roots in monetary conditions, the monetary problem had part of its roots in mechanization. He saw that in his day the evolution of machinery was determining the evolution of capitalism, and not the reverse, as maintained by the orthodox economists. The phases through which the capitalist organization of society passed were consequent upon the unrestricted use of machinery and were not to be separated from it. Thus, the tendency of capital towards centralization was dependent upon the development of railways and telegraphs which enabled a central control to be exercised, while the legalization of the principle of limited liability, which has exercised such a decisive influence on the development of finance came about because as industrial developments called for an amount of capital that the private capitalist was unable to supply, it was necessary to protect the position of the individual investor who too frequently was called upon to suffer for the incompetence or dishonesty of others. The problem of credit and the establishment of the gold standard were also intimately connected with the economic expansion that followed the Industrial Revolution. Realization of the causal importance of machinery is the one grain of truth in Marx, though he shares the weakness of reformers generally of making too exclusive claims for his discovery. He reduces his theory to absurdity by assuming that because in his day the productive forces were exercising a decisive influence on social and economic development, they had exercised a corresponding influence at every other stage of social development, which is ridiculous. It does not follow that because today society is at the mercy of its machines, pre-industrial society was at the mercy of the tools of the craftsman. Machinery is coercive; tools are not.

How to Read "Lycidas"

PAUL ELMER MORE

AFTER passing, as I might say, through the valley of the shadow of death, after months of physical prostration so abject that reading of any sort was beyond the strength of a depleted brain, the poet to whom I turned instinctively with the first renewal of health was Milton. And so I have been reading Milton again and books about him, with the old zest I had as a boy, and with an added joy of almost tremulous excitement such as a miser might feel at the rediscovery of a treasure of gold stolen from him and long buried out of sight. But with this delight have been mingled certain scruples which had troubled me in the old days and for which I had never found quite a satisfactory answer. Again, as many times before, on laying down one of the poems the familiar words of Tennyson would come unbidden to my mind:

O mighty-mouth'd inventor of harmonies,
O skill'd to sing of Time or Eternity,
God-gifted organ-voice of England,
Milton, a name to resound for ages.

Of the mighty harmonies there would be no doubt; God-gifted voice certainly; organ-voice certainly, for those who have ears to hear. If anyone in English Milton had the divine craft of words, the mastery of sonorous speech. His is not Shakespeare's incalculable gift; it lacks the element of magic that captures us in Shakespeare; it is, or soon after his earliest experiments it was, an art that came by reflection, and as we read him we imagine that we might by equal deliberation attain the same perfection – only we never do attain it. And something of this distinction Milton himself seems to have felt when he wrote of Shakespeare:

For whil'st to th' shame of slow-endevouring Art
Thy easie numbers flow.

The same distinction, I think, was present to Irving Babbitt when he spoke, as I have heard him do more than once, of his experience in quoting. It was Babbitt's custom in the first draught of his essays to cite from memory, and then, before printing, to verify the quotation by reference to the text. He would find occasionally that even his retentive memory had slipped and that he had substituted a word of his own for the poet's. And sometimes, he would say, he could not see that the substitution was inferior to the original – except in the case of Shakespeare. He never made a change in Shakespeare's language but some force or charm was lost. That was not so even with Milton. – Such a difference exists between the seemingly careless spontaneity and the elaborated art of our two supreme masters of poetical diction; and he would be a rash judge who should say that the advantage was all on one side or the other.

But to return to the question that vexed my mood of acquiescent joy. God-gifted organ-voice Milton possessed in full measure – but "voice of England"? Does he speak for the whole of England, or, that being scarcely possible, does he speak from the heart of England, giving articulate expression to that central quality which has made England what we know and love? And by his influence did he maintain that balance and moderation, that sense of law enveloping the individual, which made of Falkland a true type of the Englishman that was to be? Here the question begins with style, but extends beyond mere style to psychology and to principles of government and life.

Now, if there be any hesitation with me to accept Milton's style as the norm of good English, it is certainly not on the ground of that "dissociation of sensibility" which draws a school of modern critics and poets to repudiate what may be called the Miltonic line of development and to seek their parentage in Shakespeare and Donne and the "Metaphysicals". If I understand what the leader of that Choir means by this rather obscure phrase, it is that Milton by conscious choice and judgement dissociated his mind from one whole range of perceptions, refusing to respond to them emotionally as unrelated to a fixed theory of values, and by the same deliberate act of selection created a more or less artificial language, whereas the poets proceeding from Donne held their sensibility open to any and every perception and employed words to convey the sharp immediate impression of each fact of sense and experience without discrimination. The distinction is valid, and it is interesting; for the "modernist" in poetry it is of vital significance. But I am not sure that the "dissociation of sensibility", so taken, has been the source of dead monotony and of verbal unreality in our literature; and I am sure that if Milton failed in national leadership it was not for this reason. Rather I should say that his influence in this respect has made for sanity and form and for limitations which are characteristically English. Rather I should maintain that Milton's failure, so far as he failed, was owing to something essentially un-English, or only partially English, to something belonging to his individual temperament, which passed into his philosophy of life and diverted the love of liberty, which was the central driving force of all his being, into a morbid and isolating passion. Here too Milton was clear-headed in his application of the law to others, but curiously preverse when his own interests were affected. In the second of the sonnets on the book called *Tetrachordon*, he berates his fellow countrymen as "Owles and Cuckoos, Asses, Apes and Doggs" for the very reason that they have lost the true meaning of liberty, while they

> *bawle for freedom in this senceless mood,*
> *And still revolt when truth would set them free.*
> *License they mean when they cry libertie;*
> *For who loves that, must first be wise and good;*
> *But from that mark, how far they roave we see*
> *For all this wast of wealth, and loss of blood.*

That is sound doctrine, but – alas to say it! – Milton did not see how apt would be the retort, *de te fabula;* how easy the reply: License he meant when he cried liberty.

This book called *Tetrachordon,* written by Milton himself, was the second of his treatises on divorce, and is a bitter invective against those who, by opposing the facile freedom of marital separation, enslave the soul under man-made laws, forgetting that which "makes us holiest and likest to God's immortal image", and, for the law of liberty, setting up "that which makes us most conformable and captive to civil and subordinate precepts: . . . although indeed no ordinance, human or from heaven, can bind against the good of man". By "the good of man", as Mr. Tillyard observes in his comment on the passage, Milton means what elsewhere he calls "nature" — damnable word, I add, into which have been distilled all the fallacies of human wit through thousands of years. If you track the word down through its many ambiguities, you will discover that in the end it signifies that which a man temperamentally and personally desires as distinguished from that which is prescribed for him by human rule or divine precept. So it was that Milton, fretted and humiliated because his wife, finding existence with him intolerable, left him and ran away home, — so it was that incontinently he rebelled against the human and divine laws of marriage and wrote his pleas for freedom of divorce as complying with natural law and the good of man. If ever there was a case of liberty becoming license, it was here. However they may have differed in other respects, in this quality Milton resembled Shelley: they both identified what they desired at any moment with the natural good of man; they both made self-righteousness the law of right.

That was the beginning of Milton's public career and of his prose writings, and it was typical of what ensued. If the bishops in any way interfered with his personal idea of worship, then down with episcopacy and away with the Church; if the monarchical form of government hampered his political independence, then down with monarchy and away with the Constitution. There is no more painful reading in English literature than these apologies for free divorce and regicide which occupied the greatest genius of the age between "Lycidas" and *Paradise Lost*, and the style in which they are written is as heavy and un-English as their spirit is perverse. There are purple patches scattered through these treatises, which are all that most readers know of Milton's prose and which would give the impression that he is as magnificent here as in his verse; but if these passages are examined it will be found that, taken apart from their context, they are expressions of a personal ambition, legitimate in itself and magnificent in its devotion to the aim of a poet, while all about them floats and rages a sea of rebellious discontent. I will not endorse Hilaire Belloc's sweeping condemnation of the prose in his study of *Milton*, but as a whole it must be admitted to form a repellent body of reading. Following the ideas of the tractates through the surging verbiage, one is reminded of the monsters in the account of creation, "wallowing unweildie" in

the vast immeasurable Abyss
Outrageous as a Sea, dark, wasteful, wilde,
Up from the bottom turn'd by furious windes.

There is something disconcerting in the spectacle of a supreme artist, as Milton was in his verse, so losing his craftsmanship in another medium; what I would insist on is that the very style of his prose has a close relation to the fact that when he passes from imagination to theory his voice is not that of his people but of an exasperated individual. The seventeenth century, with all its greatness, is an age of frustration, filled with fine promises that, except in the field of science, came to no fruition, replete with noble utterance that somehow failed to convince. In the Church, in the State, in society, the one thing needed and not found was a commanding genius that should have been indeed the voice of England. It is the tragedy of the time that he who had the genius so to speak should have wasted his energies in querulous complaints against what was, and in the future was to show itself, the true spirit of the land. In a word that spirit may be described precisely as liberty, not license, as centrality, not dissent.

But I am not concerned to pass judgement on Milton's character and its effect upon his work as a whole; that is a longer theme than I care now to discuss. What I started out to do was to consider one small piece of his output, the "Lycidas", and to ask myself how it should be read. To this question, at least in its acuter form, I was moved by chancing to take up at the same time Mr. Tillyard's estimation of the poem and Dr. Johnson's. As a whole I should regard Mr. Tillyard's *Milton* as about the best book we have on the man and the poet, a study admirable for its scholarship and discrimination, and particularly notable for its treatment of the philosophical problems raised by *Paradise Lost*, such as Milton's conception of the nature of evil and the cause of man's fall. Now to Mr. Tillyard " 'Lycidas' is the last and greatest English poem of Milton's youth; though shorter, it is greater than *Comus*, written with newly-won but complete mastery and expressing a mental experience both valuable and profound". That is a sentiment with which my own reaction is in perfect accord; indeed, I should go further and hold it to be the greatest short poem of any author in English, the very criterion and touchstone of poetical taste.

Yet with that opinion I have felt bound to remember the sweeping condemnation of Johnson, to whom "the diction" of the poem "is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing". It is without passion and without art. In part no doubt Johnson's lack of appreciation can be set down to his known deficiency in the higher faculty of imagination. His comment on the diction and rhythm does nothing more than indicate a certain insensitiveness to the finer and more delicate effects of poetry in general. But one cannot read the whole essay without perceiving that his hostile criticism of the art of "Lycidas" sprang not so much from his miscomprehension and aesthetic obtuseness as from hostility to the poet and to all that Milton as a man stood for. Touching Milton's plea for looser laws of divorce, the neglect of which by the ruling Presbyterians turned him against that sect, Johnson observes, and justly: "He that changes his party by his humor is not more virtuous than he that changes it by his interest; he loves himself rather than truth." As for the political tirades, Johnson in his attack ran true to form: "Milton's republicanism was . . . founded in an envious hatred of greatness, and a sullen desire of independence. . . . He hated monarchs in the State, and prelates in the Church; for he hated all whom he was required to obey. . . . He felt not so much the love of liberty as repugnance to authority." Now for myself I do not like Belloc's summary and contemptuous characterization of Milton as "a man rotten with the two worst voices: falsehood and pride"; for somehow one shrinks from using such language of a very great poet. To Johnson's charge, on the contrary, I can subscribe without reservation (indeed I have already said much the same thing in weaker language), and I do not see how the charge, in substance, can be countered by any impartial student of Milton's life. But to Johnson the faults of the man were ruinous to the earlier work of the poet, and he denounced "Lycidas" because he read into it the author's ecclesiastical and political heresies; whereas I must reject the maker whilst admiring what he has made. And there the difficulty lies – or has lain for me: how can one so combine detestation and love? how can one make so complete a separation between Milton the destroyer of Church and State, and Milton the creative artist? how is one to read "Lycidas"?

That particular difficulty, it will be observed, opens up into one of the major problems of criticism in general: the relation between the content of a poem and the art of a poem independent of its content. In the beginning, when that distinction first presented itself to the Greek mind, it took a very simple form and indeed scarcely provoked any doubt: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were valued theoretically, not for their charm and interest, but because in them the statesman, the soldier, the athlete, the man who desired to live honorably, could find the wisest precepts and the best models. For later times, and for us of the West, the principle involved was formulated by Horace in his famous saying that the most successful poet was he who knew how to mix the *utile* and the *dulce*. What Horace meant by the *dulce* is clear enough; it is just that in a poem which gives pleasure to a reader. And what he meant by the *utile* is equally clear; it is that in a poem from which we draw instruction. So in one of the *Epistles* he tells a friend, held in Rome by the practice of declaiming, no doubt about the schools of philosophy, that he is in the country reading Homer, who is a better teacher than all the philosophers:

Qui, quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non,
Plenius ac melius Chrysippo et Crantore dicit.

In exactly that form the question reached the Renaissance critics, with the emphasis still heavily on the *utile*. So Puttenham, to cite a single example, thinks it necessary to prefare his treatise on *The Arte of English Poesie* with a long apology, wherein is shown how "poets were the first priests, the first prophets, the first Legislators and politicians in the world", as seen in Homer, Orpheus, Amphion, and the rest. You are back a thousand years and more, and might be reading one of the ancient Greek commentators. But a change came with the advent of the romantic movement. The *utile* and the *dulce* took on a new significance, and the old division was sharpened to something like an absolute contrast between two irreconcilable criteria of excellence. The *utile* was broadened so as to embrace the whole substance of a poem whether instructive or not, its sense or meaning. The *dulce* on the other hand was refined to a conception of pure poetry, the quintessence of art, as a sort of abstract entity which could be felt and judged somehow apart from any articulate thought or story conveyed; indeed the ideal poem would be a succession of beautiful words with no meaning at all.

Such a thesis, baldly stated, is manifestly bare nonsense; but practically the early romantics applied it to criticism by taking "Kubla Khan" as the ideal poem, because, while the content was no more than the shimmering matter of a dream, it reeked of that mysterious entity called pure poetry. And it was not so long ago that the theory flared up again in France under the impulse of the Abbé Brémond's monograph on *La Poésie pure*. The discussion that ensued was confused by the Abbé's association of aesthetic rapture with a mystical view of the function of prayer. More illuminating, to me at least, is T. S. Eliot's pursuit and final rejection of the same ideal of absolute poetry. In his earlier essays, particularly those on Seneca, Shakespeare, and Dante, you will see him tentatively using this *ignis fatuus* as the ultimate standard of value. In the first of those studies he ranks Shakespeare and Dante together as the supreme poets of the world, and the two are equally great though the Italian has taken up into the *Commedia* the profoundest wisdom of human experience as expounded in the Thomistic theology, whereas the Englishman has no interpretation of life's riddle beyond the stale platitudes of Seneca. "Perhaps it was Shakespeare's special rôle in history to have effected this peculiar union – perhaps it is a part of his special eminence to have expressed an inferior philosophy in the greatest poetry." It is true that Mr. Eliot has his reservations in supporting this romantic dream of pure poetry, which came to him from certain, as I think unfortunate, associations in the period before he had fully found himself, and which has haunted him all through his years of self-development. It is more important to note that in his latest enunciation he has worked himself quite clear of the disturbing inheritance. There lies before me now his recently published volume of *Essays Ancient and Modern*, and in the opening paragraph of one of the "modern" (that is, hitherto unprinted) essays I am held by this sentence: "The 'greatness' of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards." That I take to be a complete truth perfectly formulated; and the whole essay on *Religion and Literature* is a masterly application of this sentence to modern currents in verse and fiction. It is the critic come to full maturity.

And so, to apply this canon of taste to "Lycidas", it may be possible for a young man, enamored of the sheer beauty of words and untroubled as yet by the graver issues of life, to enjoy the marvelous art of the poem with no thought of what the poem means if connected with the poet's place in the world of ideas and action. But such a rupture between the form and the substance of literature cannot long be maintained with the ripening of experience. Sooner or later we are bound to make up our account with that law of taste so ably formulated: "The 'greatness' of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards." That "Lycidas" is literature, poetry and not mere verse, depends on the language, the images, the form, on that mysterious working of the imagination which we can feel but cannot ultimately analyze or adequately describe; that it is great literature must depend on the junction of such qualities with nobility of content. And such nobility is there, in full measure.

The poem is an elegy prompted by the drowning of a college friend of the author. It has been the complaint of more than one critic that the expression of grief has little of that warmth which might be expected from such a subject. Dr. Johnson can find no "effusion of real passion, for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions". Against this charge of frigidity Mr. Tillyard contends with great acumen that the true theme of the poem is not the death of Edward King at all, but the imagined death of the poet himself. Milton was writing just before he set out on his voyage to Italy, when such an adventure was more or less perilous, and the possibility of shipwreck and drowning might very well have occupied his mind. So taken, the charge of coldness towards a friend might be changed to one of cowardice or egotism. But Milton was no coward and, however he may have shown himself elsewhere, the note of egotism is relieved by the artful, though doubtless unconscious transference of anxiety for himself to sorrow for another. And it was not the mere termination of life that made him anxious, but the fear that his one all-absorbing ambition might so be left unfulfilled. To understand his state of mind and the emotion that was impelling him to write, the elegy should be read in the light of those passages of self-dedication scattered through his prose works. These purple patches laid upon the coarse cloth of controversy are too well-known to need repeating here. The keynote is given by the words inserted in the gross *Apology for Smectymnuus*:

> He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy.

And joined with this personal ambition was the conviction that no loftier or purer service could be rendered to one's country and to the world than such a work as he was preparing himself to produce. Under the spell of a great heroic poem the mind of the people would respond in efforts towards great and heroic living. That was Milton's faith. It was the spirit of the reformer engrafted upon the temperament of the artist. In such a profession, wherein personal glory is identified with public welfare, pride with humility, there lurks, let us admit, a subtle danger; to fall short of brilliant success must leave the professor a monument of ridicule, like the mountains in labor that brought forth only a mouse. But, on the other hand, such a purpose, if carried through valiantly to a successful issue, makes the ordinary ambition of the artist and poet to appear in comparison no more than a cheap parade of vanity. And Milton had the courage of conviction and the genius to succeed. In the history of English letters there is nothing like this determination carried through from youth to age except the solemn dedication of Wordsworth to a similar purpose. All this must be read into "Lycidas". Under the pretext of grief for the loss of a comrade in hope the poem is in reality as it were the quintessence of those prose passages through which there speaks a self-confidence as sublime as it was justified.

It is in the light of this life-long ambition that we should read the savage attack on the abuses in Church and State which raises the note of elegy to the "higher mood" of righteous indignation:

> *Last came and last did go,*
> *The Pilot of the* Galilean *lake* . . .
> *He shook his Miter'd locks, and stern bespake,*
> *How well could I have spar'd for thee, young swain,*
> *Anow of such as for their bellies sake,*
> *Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold?* . . .
> *But that two-handed engine at the door,*
> *Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.*

And apart from any theory of episcopacy and royalty the abuses were there and cried out for remedy. Laud knew them as well as did Baxter, Charles as well as Cromwell; but none but Milton possessed the "dread voice" which – alas, but for defects of temper! – might have done so much to set them right.

In this light also we should interpret the allegorical symbolism of the poem:

> *The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed.*

To Dr. Johnson all this masquerade of sheep and shepherds is "easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting", a cheap device of images without passion and without art. Johnson had good reason to be suspicious of a *genre* that has invited so many weak poets to indulge in flim-flam. But he should not have forgotten how all through the Old Testament, from the call that came to Amos, "who was among the herdmen of Tekoa", and all through the New Testament, from the angelic vision that broke upon the shepherds who were "abiding in the field" about Bethlehem to the parable that Jesus spake to his disciples, "I am the good shepherd and know my sheep", – how all through the Bible this pastoral allegory of the Church runs like the very music of religion.

These were the thoughts that haunted the memory of the poet when he linked himself with his friend as shepherds:

> *Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd*
> *Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,*
> *We drove a field.*

Together they were practising their "rural ditties" in preparation for the louder chant that was to stir the nation from its ignoble lethargy, when one of the twain was washed away by the sounding sea, and his voice forever silenced. And what if a like fate awaited the other, who also was about to start on a voyage? "What boots it with incessant care . . . to meditate the thankless Muse", of what avail to "live laborious dayes", when, just as we

> *think to burst out into sudden blaze,*
> *Comes the blind* Fury *with th' abhorred shears,*
> *And slits the thin spun life?*

"But not the praise," he exclaims; the reward and the outcome are not confined to this world nor are they measured by success "on mortal soil", but in heaven before the "witness of all judging *Jove*". I do not know how others are affected, but I can never peruse the climax of the poem without a thrill such as scarcely any other verses of the language excite.

Weep no more, woful Shepherds weep no more,
For Lycidas *your sorrow is not dead,*
Sunk though he be beneath the watry floor,
So sinks the day-star in the Ocean bed,
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
And tricks his beams, and with new spangled Ore,
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:
So Lycidas *sunk low, but mounted high,*
Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves
Where other groves, and other streams along,
With Nectar *pure his oozy Lock's he laves,*
And hears the unexpressive Nuptiall Song,
In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love.
There entertain him all the Saints above,
In solemn troops, and sweet Societies
That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.

Milton always rang true when he wrote of the world to come, but never before nor after did he attain quite this elevation, or achieve so realistic an expression of the invisible mysteries wrapt in the future. A few of his contemporaries possessed this power of giving substance to the hopes of eternity – notably Vaughan – but none of them approach the master. And in later times the art was simply lost. Choose the best of the moderns, Newman for instance in "The Dream of Gerontius", and they will appear cold and unconvincing beside Milton. Nor did any of the great poets of the earlier ages of faith quite equal him in this field. I would not compare the few lines of an elegy with the mighty structure of Dante's *Paradiso*, but for myself at least there is no single incident in Dante's voyage through the celestial spheres that touches me with the shock of actuality like that which I feel when I read "Lycidas". I am not competent to explain by what devices, by what choice of words, Milton obtains his sublime effect. It would be easy of course, if it seemed worth while, to point to the rich manipulation of vowel sounds in this or that verse, to note the startling obviousness of the allusion to the might of him that walked the waves, but the final alchemy of art escapes such an analysis; indeed I question whether any skill of criticism can penetrate to the heart of that mystery of the word which we call inspiration, and leave at that. But one phase of Milton's method impresses me: the fact that his images are borrowed from the simplest commonplaces of faith, – the return of dawn after the sinking of the sun in the ocean stream, the tears wiped away, the heavenly choiring of the blest. A comparison of Newman's attempt to translate the subtler speculations of theology into a poetic account of the soul's awakening after death shows how inevitably right was Milton's choice. There are regions of spiritual experience where the untutored imagination of the people goes deeper into reality than all the groping wisdom of philosophy.

One thing in the end is certain, the "greatness" of "Lycidas" is determined by an intimate marriage of form and matter, expression and substance. He who would read the poem worthily must see this, and must be equally sensitive to the delicacy of its art and to the sublimity of its ideas. This does not mean that he will forget or slur over the disagreeable traits of the poet's character or the repulsiveness of his ecclesiastical and political theories. But for our good fortune what repels us in the man and roused Johnson to a fury of protest is reserved for his prose and is excluded from his poetry — not completely indeed, for, not to mention the more outrageous sonnets, occasionally the bitterness of his disappointed soul breaks out in his later works, yet to such an extent that it is not impossible to keep the poet and the controversialist apart as two almost separate powers. That divorce has its unhappy aspect; for one thing it debars Milton, in his total effect, from being accepted as the voice of England. But it leaves to him the high credit of having raised in *Paradise Lost*, to the honor of his native land, the one monumentally successful product of that humanistic culture of the Renaissance in which originality of genius and faithfulness to the classical tradition are combined in perfect union. And for "Lycidas" there is this further apology, that the elegy was composed before Milton's splendid spirit of liberty was exacerbated by opposition into petulant license, when his personal pride flamed with a yet undiverted zeal to make of his own life a true poem and so to train himself for creating such a work of art as would lift his people from the ugly slough of faction and greed, where they were grovelling, into the finer atmosphere where pure religion and the love of beauty might flourish together.

Jones Very: A New England Mystic

YVOR WINTERS

But thou art far away among Time's toys. . . .

IN THE past two decades two major American writers have been rediscovered and established securely in their rightful places in literary history. I refer to Emily Dickinson and to Herman Melville. I am proposing the establishment of a third.

Jones Very was born at Salem, Massachusetts, on August 28th, 1813, and died there on May 8th, 1880. In 1839 a collection of his essays and poems, selected or in part selected by R. W. Emerson, was published at Boston by Little and Brown, in the third year of that firm's existence. In 1883 an incomplete but on the whole very judicious collection of his poems alone, with William P. Andrews as editor and memorialist, was issued at Boston by Houghton Mifflin. And in 1886 the same firm issued a "Complete and Revised Edition" of *Poems and Essays*, by Jones Very, with a brief but admirable biographical sketch by James Freeman Clarke, and a wholly superfluous preface by C. A. Bartol. This edition, in spite of its containing a few excellent poems lacking in the previous collection, and in spite of its offering in several instances preferable texts, may have been responsible for the death of Very's nascent reputation, for it carries an enormous amount of dead material. If there are further editions, they have not fallen into my hands; in fact

I have not seen the volume of 1839. The volume of 1886 contains as a frontispiece a photograph of the author, showing a long and narrow New England face, extremely sensitive yet equally ascetic, immaculate alike in flesh and in spirit, surely the face of a saint, and a face worthy of one of the finest of poets.

Very was about ten years younger than Emerson and about four years older than Thoreau. He preached at times in the Unitarian pulpit; he is commonly listed as one of the minor Transcendentalists; yet both facts are misleading. He was a mystic, primarily, whose theological and spiritual affiliations were with the earlier Puritans and Quakers rather than with the Unitarians or the friends of Emerson; and if a minor writer, he was at least not one in relationship to the Transcendentalists.

He was a Unitarian only by virtue of the historical connection between the Unitarian and Puritan Churches and by virtue of the wide hospitality of the Unitarians. He was not a Transcendentalist at all, but a Christian, and a dogmatic one; his only point of contact with Emerson was in regard to the surrender of the will, that is, the submission of oneself to the direct guidance of the Spirit. He differed from Emerson in that Emerson was a pantheist and a normal relativist, so that Emerson's guiding Spirit was, in effect, instinct and personal whim, which, in his terms, became identical with the Divine Imperative, but which, in practice, amounted to a kind of benevolent if not invariably beneficent sentimentalism. The religious experience for Emerson was a kind of good-natured self-indulgence; for Very it was a sublime exaltation, which appears to have endured until his death. Very was beyond question a saintly man, and one hesitates to doubt a saint when he states that he is a mystic. Very's poems bear witness unanswerably that he had the experience which Emerson merely recommends.

Very's spiritual life was passed on that minute island of being, which is occupied in common by the more exalted of the Friends and of the Puritans. Whereas the Friend taught the importance of the submission to the Divine Will, the Puritan taught the inevitability of the submission; the private will, either way, is stricken from the conscious life of the intensely devout; and when the Holy Spirit bears witness to the beatitude of the Puritan, as it bore witness in the heart of Jonathan Edwards, that Puritan lives much as does an exalted member of the Society of Friends. The reader might be led to believe that Very's connections with the Friends were more obvious than his connections with the Puritans, for he recommended the submission of the will in many poems, and in only one—"Justification by Faith", which appears only in the edition of 1886—spoke of the inevitability of the submission; but as a Unitarian, his background was Puritan, and it is characteristic of the Puritan, as of every other kind of determinist, to recommend on moral grounds that which he believes inevitable as a matter of cosmology, to confess by implication to a belief in that power of choice which he explicitly denies.

The perfect dogmatic definition of Very's position as a New England mystic occurs in the sonnet entitled "The Hand and Foot":

The hand and foot that stir not, they shall find
Sooner than all the rightful place to go:

Now in their motion free as roving wind,
Though first no snail so limited and slow;
I mark them full of labor all the day,
Each active motion made in perfect rest;
They cannot from their path mistaken stray,
Though 'tis not theirs, yet in it they are blest;
The bird has not their hidden track found out,
The cunning fox though full of art he be;
It is the way unseen, the perfect rout,
Wherever bound, yet thou art ever free;
The path of Him, whose perfect law of love
Bids spheres and atoms in just order move.

Thus the Puritan theologian, John Norton, wrote in 1654: "The liberty of man, though subordinate to God's decree, freely willeth the very same thing and no other than that which it would have willed if (upon a supposition of impossibility) there had been no decree." And again: "Man acts as freely as if there were no decree; yet as infallibly as if there were no liberty."* And Isaac Chauncey, writing in 1694, says that God's decree "maintains the liberty of the creature's will, that all free agents act as freely according to the decree as agents of necessity do act necessarily".† The first two lines of the poem imply an initial choice; the remainder of the poem deals with the mystical experience, regardless of how it may have been entered upon; and the twelfth line is in effect a paraphrase of the statements just quoted from the theologians. It is curious to observe that the resolu-

* *The Orthodox Evangelist* by John Norton; quoted from *History of New England Theology* by John Hugh Foster (University of Chicago Press, 1909).

† *The Doctrine Which is According to Godliness* by Isaac Chauncey, 1694; from Foster.

tion of the two discordant doctrines of free choice and predestination, as it appears in the theologians, is purely verbal; it was as a result of the inability of the Puritans to establish a genuine resolution that their Church declined; yet in the poem, while one is reading the poem, the resolution is experienced. The reader may draw from this any moral he sees fit.

Very saw in the surrender to God of the will not only the means of salvation, but the sole act of the will acceptable as an act of devotion. Similarly, Edwards, from the more strictly Puritan point of view, saw in the doctrine of predestination the only doctrine that tended adequately to the glory of God:

> Hence these doctrines and schemes of divinity that are in any respect opposite to such an absolute and universal dependence upon God, derogate from his glory, and thwart the design of our redemption. And such are those schemes that . . . own an entire dependence upon God for some things, but not for others; they own that we depend on God for the Gift and Acceptance of a Redeemer, but deny so absolute a dependence on him for the obtaining an interest in the Redeemer. . . . They own a dependence on God for the means of Grace, but not so absolutely for the success.*

Edwards seems to be guilty of the heresy which he is attacking (that is, "trust in a covenant of works") for were the dependence absolute, no doctrine could thwart our redemption, and no theologian need come to aid us. It was in the same spirit that Edwards brought about a revival in the Puritan Church, that is, induced large numbers of sinners to repent, by preach-

* *God Glorified in Man's Redemption* by Jonathan Edwards, 1731; from Foster.

ing in language of almost unequalled magnificence and terror the doctrine of predestination and of the inability to repent. It was in the same spirit that the Mathers took it upon themselves to rid New England of witches. For the exercise of the will, the sense of the moral drama, was not at first weakened by the impact of Calvinistic dogma, but was excited by the new exaltation of spirit, and as the will was excited, so was the study of its proper use neglected by a doctrine which denied it and which relegated a belief in the efficaciousness of good works to the category of sin, and this discrepancy led at times to intense and mystical piety on the one hand, and frequently to brutal bigotry on the other, the two often existing in a single man, as in Cotton Mather.

In Emerson the exercise of the will is as active as ever, and his moral judgements are frequently made with force and with accuracy; but his central doctrine is that of submission to emotion, which for the pantheist is a kind of divine instigation: an inadmissible doctrine, for it eliminates at a stroke both choice and the values that serve as a basis for choice, in rendering man an automaton, thus paralyzing all genuine action, so that Emerson's acceptable acts of expression are accidental poems or epigrams drawing their only nutriment from the fringe or from beyond the fringe of his doctrine.

Emerson was the most influential preacher to appear in America after Edwards, for the lecture platform was merely the ultimate step in the secularization of the pulpit, a step that was inevitable after Unitarianism had displaced Calvinism. And he was the most widely read and most pungent aphorist to appear since that other limb of the Devil, Benjamin Franklin. The Church, and the spirit which had maintained it, were in ruins; and the acceptance of Emerson's doctrine produced a new spirit, foreign even to his own, or at least acting in regions beyond his comprehension and in ways that would surely have troubled him. In Emerson's day, the practical, if illogical, Calvinism, which, as an historical fact, had enabled Hawthorne to produce *The Scarlet Letter*, existed only in a few rapidly crumbling islands of culture, such as that to which we owe Emily Dickinson; and the mystical Puritanism which had lived in Anne Hutchinson and in Jonathan Edwards existed nowhere that we can determine save in the spirit of Jones Very.

That Very should so long have been neglected, that he should be left, a century after the production of most of his best poetry, to the best defense that one, like myself, at every turn unsympathetic with his position, is able to offer, is one of the anomalies of literary history. Of the sincerity of his profession, we can hold no doubt. His poems are as convincing, and as excellent, as are the poems of Blake, of Traherne, or of George Herbert. His contemporaries, those who regarded him not only in spirit, but in the flesh, paid his sincerity the highest tribute that men can pay to that of any man: they adjudged him insane. He voluntarily spent a short time under observation, but was discharged. "At the McLean Asylum," says Emerson, "the patients severally thanked him when he came away, and told him that he had been of great service to them." It was during his stay at the asylum that he finished his three essays in literary criticism, which, whatever their faults, are beautifully written and display great penetration and perfect presence of mind.

The attitude of the Transcendentalists toward Very is instructive and amusing, and it proves beyond cavil how remote he was from them. In respect to the doctrine of the submission of the will, he agreed with them in principle; but whereas they recommended the surrender, he practised it, and they regarded him with amazement. It is worthy of note in this connection, that had Emerson accomplished the particular surrender which, as a pantheist, he directly or indirectly recommended, he would have been mad, that is, an automaton guided by instinct; that the surrender recommended by Emerson when carried no farther than it was commonly carried by his disciples, that is, to the point of an uncritical exaggeration of the importance of temperament, led to the pastoral idiosyncracies of Thoreau, who valued a packing box as highly as a house and a scrap of newspaper as highly as Homer, or led to the mild idiocy of Alcott, who refused to eat root vegetables because they grew downward instead of aspiring upward; whereas surrender in Very's terms—and we who have never practised Very's surrender may reasonably refrain from offering any doubts or other views as to the absolute truth of the terms—meant an experience of a wholly different order.

James Freeman Clarke, in his biographical sketch of Very, has thus described an encounter between Very and Channing:

> I was one day at Dr. Channing's house, when he had just received a visit from Jones Very. Dr. Channing, like Emerson, was always looking for any symptoms of a new birth of spiritual life in the land. Having heard of Mr.

Very, he invited him to come and see him, and inquired what were his views on religious subjects. Having listened attentively, he asked him whether it was in consequence of his invitation or in obedience to the Spirit that he came to Boston that morning. Mr. Very answered, "I was directed to accept your invitation." Then Dr. Channing said, "I observed that during our conversation you left your chair and went while speaking to the fireplace, and rested your arm on the mantel. Did you do that of your own accord, or in obedience to the Spirit?" Very replied, "In obedience to the Spirit." And indeed, if it has become a habit of the soul to be led in all things, great and small, why not in this, too? Only, I suppose, that most of us would not think it worth while to consult the Spirit in such a purely automatic action as this.

That the gulf between Emerson and Very, if not wide, was yet immeasurably profound, we may observe from one of Emerson's notes:

> When Jones Very was in Concord, he had said to me: "I always felt when I heard you speak, or read your writings, that you saw the truth better than others; yet I felt that your spirit was not quite right. It was as if a vein of colder air blew across me." He seemed to expect from me—once especially in Walden Wood—a full acknowledgment of his mission, and a participation in the same. Seeing this, I asked him if he did not see that my thoughts and my position were constitutional, and that it would be false and impossible for me to say his things or try to occupy his ground as for him to usurp mine? After some time and full explanation he conceded this. When I met him afterwards, one evening at my lecture in Boston, I invited him to go home to Mr. A.'s with me to sleep; which he did. He slept in the room adjoining mine. Early next day, in the gray dawn, he came into my

room and talked while I dressed. He said: "When I was in Concord I tried to say you were also right; but the Spirit said you were not right. It is just as if I should say, It is not morning, but the Morning says it is the Morning."

Surely no misunderstanding could have been more complete: Emerson tried to explain to Very that truth is relative, and Very tried to point out to Emerson that truth is absolute. Very had been subjected to an overwhelming experience, and he was certain of what he had lived; Emerson had had no such experience, but by trusting implicitly to the whimsical turns of his thought he had arrived at certain beliefs regarding it. Emerson, who was interested primarily in thought about the mystical experience, and whose attitude toward thought was self-indulgent, could not think clearly or coherently; and Very, whose thought was precise, if limited, whose attitude toward thought was ascetic, who regarded thought as sin, save as directed by the Spirit, accomplished a life of nearly perfect intuition.

The absolute strangeness of Very to Emerson's group of friends may best be shown by another passage from Emerson: "When he is in the room with other persons, speech stops, as if there were a corpse in the apartment." After such testimonials, we need no longer think of him as a Transcendentalist.

In the poem entitled "Yourself", that is, addressed to the reader, Very indicates his awareness of the difficulty that the outsider will have in understanding the nature of his communion with the Spirit:

But now you hear us talk as strangers, met

Above the room wherein you lie abed;
A word perhaps loud spoken you may get,
Or hear our feet when heavily we tread;
But he who speaks, or him who's spoken to,
Must both remain as strangers still to you.

We may accept Very's explanation of the imperfect audibility, since he has every appearance of deep conviction; yet to us, in the lower room, he none the less remains imperfectly audible, and if our life is to be passed in the lower room, we must concern ourselves primarily with its conditions, lest, in the dark, we break our heads against a door or a cabinet. But while recognizing that Very's mystical poetry is imperfectly relevant to us, we may get what we can from it, and since that which we can obtain is frequently of great value, we can scarcely be losers in the relationship.

To the fine anguish which Very suffered from his sense of defilement in a sinful world, and to the strange conflict which must have lived within him between this feeling and the real humility which appears in many of his poems, we may obtain a clue in the extraordinary poem entitled "Thy Brother's Blood":

I have no brother. They who meet me now
Offer a hand with their own wills defiled,
And, while they wear a smooth unwrinkled brow,
Know not that Truth can never be beguiled.
Go wash the hand that still betrays thy guilt;—
Before the Spirit's gaze what stain can hide?
Abel's red blood upon the earth is spilt,
And by thy tongue it cannot be denied.
I hear not with the ear,—the heart doth tell
Its secret deeds to me untold before;

Go, all its hidden plunder quickly sell,
Then shalt thou cleanse thee from thy brother's gore,
Then will I take thy gift;—that bloody stain
Shall not be seen upon thy hand again.

Similarly, Emerson reports of his conversation as follows: "He says it is with him a day of hate: that he discerns the bad element in every person whom he meets, which repels him: he even shrinks a little to give the hand, that sign of receiving."*

To give a better indication of the power and purity of statement to which Very attains, I shall quote a few more poems and passages. The quotation of brief passages is largely unjust, for Very is not a poet of separable moments; his poems are reasoned and coherent, and the full force of a passage will be evident only when one meets it in the context. Further, there is a feeling of intense personal conviction in Very, a kind of saturation with his subject and his feeling, which one tends to lose in a brief passage; it is a conviction so extraordinary that in some of his secondary achievements it is able to carry a considerable weight of stereotyped language without the destruction of the poem. To appreciate the finer shades of his statement one should be familiar, moreover, with his work as a whole, for he is essentially a theological poet, and his references to doctrine are on the one hand fleeting and subtle, and on the other hand of the utmost importance to a perception of his beauty; and in addition, his finest effects are the result of fine variations in tone, the appreciation of which must of necessity depend in a large measure upon a consciousness of the norm from which the variations occur.

---

* This passage and all others quoted herein from Emerson appear in the Journals and are quoted by Andrews in his memoir of 1883.

The following poem, "The Garden", is restrained and precise in its imagery, and may conceivably find few admirers; an appreciation of its beauty depends upon a realization of the mystical significance, or some part of it, back of the description; though my own sympathy with the author's religious views is largely one of a kind of hypothetical acquiescence, the poem nevertheless seems very fine to me:

I saw the spot where our first parents dwelt;
And yet it wore to me no face of change.
And while amid its fields and groves, I felt
As if I had not sinned, nor thought it strange;
My eye seemed but a part of every sight,
My ear heard music in each sound that rose;
Each sense forever found a new delight,
Such as the spirit's vision only knows;
Each act some new and ever-varying joy
Did by my Father's love for me prepare;
To dress the spot my ever fresh employ,
And in the glorious whole with Him to share;
No more without the flaming gate to stray,
No more for sin's dark stain the debt of death to pay.

The next poem, "The Lost", is one of the author's four or five most beautiful; it appears to go close to the heart of the mystical experience, and in spite of the obscurity resulting is unforgettable. The subject is that of identity with God, and hence with all time and place, of the divine life in the unchanging present of eternity; or rather the subject is the comparison of that life with the life of man, "the lost". The mysterious and subdued longing expressed in the poem culminates, perhaps, in lines five and six, and again in lines nine and ten, and the reader may possibly work his way into the poem best by concentrating for a moment on these lines; the poem, however, is a unit and impeccable:

The fairest day that ever yet has shone,
Will be when thou the day within shalt see;
The fairest rose that ever yet has blown,
When thou the flower thou lookest on shalt be;
But thou are far away among Time's toys;
Thyself the day thou lookest for in them,
Thyself the flower that now thine eye enjoys,
But wilted now thou hang'st upon thy stem.
The bird thou hearest on the budding tree,
Thou hast made sing with thy forgotten voice;
But when it swells again to melody,
The song is thine in which thou wilt rejoice;
And thou new risen 'midst these wonders live,
That now to them dost all thy substance give.

The same subject reappears in the poem entitled "Today", a lovely but less finished performance, of which I quote the first half:

I live but in the present,—where art thou?
Hast thou a home in some past, future year?
I call to thee from every leafy bough,
But thou art far away and canst not hear.

Each flower lifts up its red or yellow head,
And nods to thee as thou art passing by:
Hurry not on, but stay thine anxious tread,
And thou shalt live with me, for there am I.

"The New Man", a companion-piece to "The Lost", which appears only in the edition of 1886, like "The

Hand and the Foot", the first poem quoted in this essay, treats the converse of this theme, or the experience of salvation:

The hands must touch and handle many things,
The eyes long waste their glances all in vain;
The feet course still in idle, mazy rings,
Ere man himself, the lost, shall back regain
The hand that ever moves, the eyes that see,
While day holds out his shining lamp on high,
And, strait as flies the honey-seeking bee,
Direct the feet to unseen flowers they spy;
These, when they come, the man revealed from heaven,
Shall labor all the day in quiet rest
And find at eve the covert duly given,
Where with the bird they find sweet sleep and rest,
That shall their wasted strength to health restore,
And bid them seek with morn the hills and fields once more.

Much of Very's Nature poetry, especially of his later work, is merely dull; the best of it resembles that of Blake, but is less excellent. Nature, as in Blake, is seen through a daze of beatitude and with only occasional clarity of outline. Nevertheless, there are lovely passages. The following lines are from the sonnet entitled "To the Pure All Things Are Pure":

Nature shall seem another house of thine,
When he who formed thee bids thee live and play,
And in thy rambles e'en the creeping vine
Shall keep with thee a jocund holiday.

This is from "The Song":

I plunge me in the river's cooling wave,
Or on the embroidered bank admiring lean,
Now some endangered insect life to save,

Now watch the pictured flowers and grasses green;
Forever playing where a boy I played,
By hill and grove, by field and stream delayed.

Equally lovely are "The Wild Rose of Plymouth", "The Fair Morning" (as it appears in the edition of 1886), and "The Lament of the Flowers", which appears only in the edition of 1886, an indescribably haunting poem, too long to quote in full and too elusive to quote in part. In "Autumn Flowers", the natural description becomes a firm moral allegory; the poem is nearly one of the best and tempts one to compare it with Bridge's "The birds that sing on autumn eves". I quote three of the five stanzas:

Still blooming on, when Summer flowers all fade,
The golden-rods and asters fill the glade;
The tokens they of an Exhaustless Love
That ever to the end doth constant prove.

To one fair tribe another still succeeds,
As still the heart new forms of beauty needs;
Till these bright children of the waning year,
Its latest born, have come our souls to cheer.

They glance upon us from their fringèd eyes,
And to their look our own in love replies;
Within our hearts we find for them a place,
As for the flowers which early Spring-time grace.

Yet was there not some excuse for the disturbed clergymen of New England, who, when Very called upon them in their studies and exhorted them to a more devout life, believed him a madman? The clergymen did not represent civilization and the moral life, exactly, but they represented what was left of civilization and the moral life in New England—they were at least the ruined dust of tradition—and Very, though a living spirit, was primarily representative of something else. He was not mad, but he existed in a state resembling madness from a strictly moralistic point of view: he denied the existence, so far as practical behavior was concerned, of the whole world of judgement and of choice; he was like Parmenides, who, having proven the universe by logic to be a perfect and motionless sphere, and having observed about him a universe which did not conform to the definition, pronounced the latter an illusion and turned his back upon it forever.

But in that illusion we live from day to day; and in that life of illusion we govern ourselves by judgement and by choice; and should we deny or lose control of these, the illusion would become a horror. A Very, a Traherne, a Blake, is a luxury which we can well afford so long as he refrains from making converts. Should he convert us all, he would certainly be destroyed along with us, or so, to us in our darkness, it must needs appear. But secure and unimpeded in our universe, which he deplores, he expresses one limited aspect of our spiritual life, an aspect which, to express well, he must live fully. The Roman Church has canonized individual mystics, but has suppressed or excommunicated the mystical sects.

But Very seldom preached, like Emerson; rather, he gave us his life: he is a mystic, not a sectary and a reformer. Emerson, if he was to concern himself with mysticism at all, could do no other than reform, for he had no mystical life to give: if we are to judge him by his writing, he never experienced that which he recommended, and judged in his own terms he was a failure. His poetry deals not with the experience, but with his own theory of the experience; it is not mystical poetry, but gnomic or didactic poetry, and as the ideas expounded will not stand inspection, the poetry is ultimately poor in spite of vigorous phrases. Or to put the difference another way, Very speaks with the authority of experience, whereas Emerson claims to speak with the authority of thought, but he lacks that authority.

Yet the measure of Emerson's failure may seem at times the measure of the superiority of at least a little of his poetry to Very, at any rate to those of us who inhabit the lower room, the chamber of illusions, and endeavor to keep it in order that the mystic on the floor above us may suffer as little inconvenient disturbance as possible. For Emerson's failure drove him to examine at odd moments the broken shards and tablets buried in his character from an earlier culture. He was by accident and on certain occasions a moral poet, and he was by natural talent a poet of a good deal of power. When we come from the more purely mystical works of Very to "The Concord Hymn" or to "Days", we may feel that we are entering a world of three dimensions, of solid obstacles, and of comprehensible nobility.

But we have not done with Very so easily. Emerson at the core is a fraud and a sentimentalist, and his fraudulence impinges at least lightly upon everything he wrote: when it disappears from the subject, it lingers in the tone. Very at the core is a saint, and the impeccable rightness of his judgement emerges in many and curious ways. When he brings his character to bear upon matters that we can understand, we find ourselves, for all our doubts, in the presence of one of the greatest devotional poets in English. The following sonnet is entitled "The Presence":

I sit within my room, and joy to find
That Thou, who always lov'st, art with me here;
That I am never left by Thee behind,
But by Thyself Thou keep'st me ever near.
The fire burns brighter when with Thee I look,
And seems a kinder servant sent to me;
With gladder heart I read Thy holy book,
Because Thou art the eyes by which I see;
This aged chair, that table, watch, and door
Around in ready service ever wait;
Nor can I ask of Thee a menial more
To fill the measure of my large estate.
For Thou thyself, with all a Father's care,
Where'er I turn, art ever with me there.

The following poem, "The Created", is probably the best single poem that Very composed:

There is naught for thee by thy haste to gain;
'Tis not the swift with me that win the race;
Through long endurance of delaying pain,
Thine opened eye shall see thy Father's face;
Nor here nor there, where now thy feet would turn,
Thou wilt find Him who ever waits for thee;
But let obedience quench desires that burn,
And where thou art thy Father too will be.
Behold! as day by day the spirit grows,
Thou see'st by inward light things hid before;
Till what God is, thyself, His image, shows;
And thou wilt wear the robe that first thou wore,
When bright with radiance from His forming hand,
He saw the lord of all His creatures stand.

We have here perfection of structure, perfection and power of phrase, great moral scope, and sublimity of conception. Equally perfect, but of less power, is a hymn entitled "The Visit"; nearly as perfect is a song, "The Call", of which the last stanza is missing from the edition of 1883; less perfect still, and less compact, but of a magnificance comparable at moments to that of Henry Vaughan, is a hymn entitled "The Coming of the Lord". There are other poems of less importance, because of imperfections or of limitations of scope, but still worthy of examination: "The Still-Born", which appears only in the edition of 1886, "The Son", "In Him We Live", "The Earth", "The New Birth", "The New World", "The Morning Watch", "The Dead", "The Prison", "Enoch", and "The Cottage"; and there are doubtless others.

Very numbered among his admirers Emerson, Channing, Clarke, Andrews, Charles Eliot Norton, Bryant, and other persons of distinction; his contemporaries repeatedly compared him to George Herbert, and it would appear with reason. Yet for fifty years he has rested in oblivion, except as a name, incorrectly described, in the academic summaries of his period. It is now fifty-six years since his death, and a hundred years since he first entered upon his full poetic power; in a year or two we shall have the centenary of his commitment to the McLean Asylum. In this last, at least, it should be possible to find some significance that will justify our recalling him to memory. Perhaps the moral is merely this: that it is nearly time that we paid him the apology long due him and established him clearly and permanently in his rightful place in the history of our literature.

The Forgotten Class

Part II

RALPH ADAMS CRAM

IN MY last paper I emphasized at its ending the sound foundations for the building of a new social power, that are to be found in the once discredited "middle class". This is that, at present, "forgotten class" that lies between the minority groups that now determine social, economic, and political action, not by right but by prescription. As I said, the use of the phrase, "middle class", has a more or less prejudicial connotation that has come down to us from the self-satisfied and supercilious nineteenth century, particularly from its later decades, but much water has run under the bridge since then. The shibboleths of fifty years ago now sound thin and hollow and have taken on only an antiquarian interest. A very important task today is that of making "middle class" into a name of honor and of power rather than of disparagement.

At this point it is necessary, however, to enter a caveat. As the Forgotten Class comprises the majority of the people of this Republic, so it contains a wide diversity of types, from the small farmer on his rocky, mishandled, mostly worn-out New England acres, the small shopkeeper fighting for his life against the chain-store and the mail-order house, the craftsman or artisan outside the ramparts of organized labor, to the college professor, the artist, and the parson. Equally great is the diversity of character-quality, inherent ideas, and life-motivation. The middle class of the nineteenth century did have substantial unity and when, then, the noun was changed into an adjective, there was some ground for its use in an opprobrious sense. *Main Street*, as a portrait, was not altogether inaccurate. Its vision was exceedingly circumscribed, its scheme of life earth-bound and pedestrian, its morals conspicuous but stodgy, its religion very largely compact of the bean-supper, a degenerate Protestant superstition, and ballyhoo. On the other hand, it had the real virtues of self-reliance, sturdy independence, social kindliness, and a true sense of communal and national patriotism. Above all, without quite knowing why, it was suspicious of the growing trend towards money-capitalism, big business, and technocracy.

During the last generation the unlovely qualities of this old middle class have been intensified. The protagonists of progress had felt pretty sure that the new instruments of culture and civilization that had come into operation with the opening of the new century would, almost automatically, exert a very enlightening and progressive influence. Automobiles, electric refrigerators, mechanical washing-machines; the victrola, radio, and telephone; the mail-order catalogue, pulp magazines, and the new journalism, let alone the broadening influence in general of big business and an expanding technocracy, could only result in a corresponding opening-out of hitherto somewhat circumscribed minds. Apparently this hope has been vain. From sea to sea and frontier to frontier, this middle class of the last century has firmly fixed itself in a recognizable identity; it is no longer identified with the Mississippi Valley and its hinterlands. From Minnesota to Arkansas, from the dreary plains of Kansas and the Dakotas to the mountains of Tennessee and Georgia, Maine and Oregon, Ohio and Louisiana – these, with all between, now reveal the type that once, in legend, was assigned to the old "Bible belt". Undoubtedly the old virtues of this class have remained, but they are now pretty well submerged under the drift and the detritus of current civilization. Radio and pulp-magazine, newspapers and public-school education, back-slapping societies consecrated to "service" and a deliquescent Protestantism have done their work.

Evidences of this mental degeneration have multiplied in the last twenty-five years with depressing velocity. The second Ku Klux Klan set the pace. Since then we have such phenomena as national prohibition, the Scopes trial, the Townsend, Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and Father Divine manias, with the Hauptmann trial, its concomitants and implications, as a final manifestation of the essential quality and the pervasive extent of the new psychology. A depressing and even alarming phenomenon.

On the other hand, and by force of economic circumstances, a vast multitude of citizens of a very different type now find themselves in the same boat with the old middle class that is suffering a sort of fatty degeneration of intelligence and character. Here, now, united in the common brotherhood of basic necessities, with the social categories so rapidly reverting to type, we find all of Matthew Arnold's "saving remnant", the "élite" of Ortega and Berdyaev, the exponents of all the vital culture and veritable civilization existent in society. Nothing could be better, or more promising for the future, than that these representatives of flourishing life should now be found in this connection, for not only are their interests identical, but each has much to give to the other. The fast-slipping "middle class", misunderstood and derided in the nineteenth century, can be arrested in its declension through association with the "élite", while they, in their turn, can be saved from that supercilious and sterile hedonism that always overtakes this phase of being when it is cut off from close association, in interest and actions, with those of a more primitive but equally, even a more, dynamic type. The old "middle class" must be won away from its present following of all the vulgarity and the crude, depressed mentality that are by-products of "modern civilization", while the "saving remnant" must come to realize that their kinship is to be found, not with the money- and the power-aristocracy that, by force of its wealth and its bourgeois patronage, has assumed, and been tacitly granted, a leadership to which it can make no valid claim. Between the small farmer, the small tradesman, the small artisan and the representatives of all high culture, high, creative achievement, and high ideals, a certain conscious solidarity, based on a fundamental identity of necessities and interests, will have to be accomplished.

I do not know how this sense of solidarity, this "class consciousness", if you like, is to be achieved, but somehow it has to be brought about, for if salving and redemptive energy is to be applied to our pathological social condition, it may be found only here. It is useless to expect any aid from the politicians or through the political system they represent. Water cannot rise above its source, and the source of political energy is the mass man, regardless of the class of society to which he belongs. Political action is conditioned by considerations of expediency, partisanship, and self-interest. The horizon of its vision is that of an ophthalmic defective. To quote from Mr. Nock's salutary *Our Enemy the State*: "We are all aware that not only the vision of the ordinary man, but also his wisdom and sentiment, have a very short radius of operation; they cannot be stretched over an area of much more than township size." When it comes to the official political representation of this "common man", this radius of vision is not apt to reach beyond the four walls of his house – or office. As Guizot said, long ago, "A belief in the sovereign power of political machinery is a gross delusion."

For a century and a half it has been bred in the bone of the citizenry that *political* agencies and forms were the framework of society and automatically we accept this as a fact of some sort of revelation. It has become a dogma received without question or demur. It never had any basis and we are coming now to realize this. In the countries that have had their eyes opened through the drastic experience of comprehensive calamity, substitutes are being tried; in Germany and what once was Russia, raw, brazen, brute force; in Italy, Poland, Austria, something a little more plausible and less destructive of basic freedom and all else that differentiates man from the lower animals. With us the superstition still holds, though in the light of our experience, cumulative now for seventy years, it seems highly improbable that it should hold sway much longer.

How anything more lucid and plausible is to be put in its place is a problem that seems to defy solution, yet in some way an answer must be found. If the forgotten class could become conscious of itself and realize its substantial solidarity; if it could become aware of its latent power, and if it would engender, and submit to, competent, effective, and constructive leadership, the answer would be found, for in itself it has both the power of intelligence and the weight of numbers. Leadership, and acceptance of leadership, is, next to the sense of common interest and a consciousness of the degree to which it has been exploited and ignored, the essential necessity. To quote Ortega again: "Before long there will be heard throughout the planet a formidable cry, rising like the howling of innumerable dogs to the stars, asking for someone or something to take command, to impose an obligation, a duty."

An awakened "class consciousness" comes first, the discovery and acceptance of leadership follows: granted those two factors, something can be done. That "something" is, in simple words, the abolition of politics and politicians, and the substitution in their place of a *social* organism. We have lived so long under a political regime that, in plain fact, we accept it as the only law of social and governmental life. The whole fantastic scheme of primaries, party conventions, party committees, nominating conventions, platforms, electoral campaigns, whirlwind speaking-tours, bands, blah, and ballyhoo, all arranged by small groups of realist (*i.e.*, cynical) promoters in hotel back-rooms, seems as inevitable as the precession of the equinoxes or the law of gravitation. For a century this system has been in process. Not only has it become an integral part of the popular consciousness, but it has developed the political class, a type that is highly specialized, acute, cynical, and with complete mastery of the tricks and methods of its trade. Drawn from the middle or lower grades of the mass man, it is marked by all its mental and moral characteristics. It is without ideals, vision, or principles. It lives, moves, and has its being in a world of expediency, compromise, and the policy of get results. It subsists on the exploitation of the dumbness and mob psychology of the class from which it came.

Into its well-knit ranks it draws, from time to time, a few men of character and high principles, some because they naïvely believe that they may leaven the lump, or at least measurably offset the majority type, some because they like a life of active adventure – as big-game hunters haunt the jungles of Africa to stack themselves up against other savage types of wild life. These, however, are exceptions, while their efforts at redemption or palliation amount to zero. I suppose that never, since the founding of the Republic, has the power and the efficiency of this political cabal been so pervasive, so omnipotent, and so cynically effective as now. Ever since the Armistice it has been increasing in power and dominion, and particularly during the last three years, municipal, state, and national governments now express nothing except the mental character and the personality of the mass man, regnant, and operating through the political class. A frank survey of civil government, as this shows itself at this time throughout the length and breadth of the land, is enough to demonstrate the truth of this statement.

There are, of course, as always, honorable exceptions. "You cannot bring an indictment against a whole people." There are here and there mayors, governors, members of state legislatures, senators and congressmen in Washington, individual heads of executive departments, who are fighting heroically against political self-seeking, chicanery, and corruption. Chief amongst them I should put the President. He has, I am persuaded, high principles, integrity of character, and a wider breadth of vision than most politicians – for he is this as well as a patriot. His career and the conduct of his administration are, however, a convincing example of the fate that overtakes the patriotic Daniels in the dens of a primitive and voracious type of lions. He would have saved the country, but two powers were against him: the politicians as exemplified by the astute and omnipotent Mr. Farley, and the half-baked sociological theories of the Columbia University school of sociology and economics. Both stem from the same mass-man trunk, and I am not sure that the educated mass man is not more dangerous than the uneducated. Without background, sense of tradition, or an inherited culture, he is apt to become a theorist with no sense of reality. With little knowledge of the past and no regard for it whatever, cut off from all cultural continuity, he is fatally susceptible to "every wind of doctrine" and so lays hold with avidity on whatever calls itself new. Lacking sound standards of value, he accepts, or sometimes himself invents, this new, and refuses to test it by any authority outside himself. As Ortega says:

The man we are now analyzing accustoms himself not to appeal from his own to any authority outside him. . . . The simple process of preserving our present civilization is supremely complex and demands incalculably subtle powers. Ill-fitted to direct it is this average man who has learned to use much of the machinery of civilization, but who is characterized by root-ignorance of the very principles of that civilization.

A good example of the output of that particular type of mind is the ill-fated AAA. If ever there was a more futile list of empirical devices than was to be found here, history fails to record it, except, perhaps, in the annals of the Roman Empire just before its fall and extinction. To slaughter animals, plough under crops, and to pay farmers for not working their land and raising stock and crops, while some ten or fifteen millions of unemployed were suffering from lack of food and clothing and had to be supported from the levies on the general public, was a procedure so fantastic that it takes its place in the extensive records of human imbecility. The post-impressionist school of economics invented this fascinating device and the political hegemony promptly accepted it and put it into practice. And that was that.

Between these two schools of political skullduggery and cubist modernism, again we fall to the ground. The first, to change the simile, was the cynical and effective use of the forgotten class as fuel for the fire by which the politicians warmed themselves; the second was the utilization of the same class as so many guinea pigs in an experimental laboratory. The resulting situation has been neither agreeable nor salutary, therefore the question that naturally suggests itself to the enquiring mind is: Is there a way out for America?

So far as I can see, and my field of vision is certainly as narrowly circumscribed as that of the other star-gazers or earth-bound intellects of the present time (therefore I speak under correction), there is only one way, and that is liquidation of the whole system of *political* organization, representation, and control, and the substitution in its place of some sort of *functional* organization, representation, and control.

There is no valid reason why the affairs of human society should be directed by politicians anyway; they are by definition (and by demonstration) the least competent to this arduous task and exalted duty, of all classes, with the possible exception of what are known as "business men" and "proletarians", this last nomenclature being used in the Bolshevik sense. Their present monopoly grew up naturally enough as the Constitution got into working order, though nothing of the sort had been envisaged by the Framers. General Jackson (the democratic Nemesis of Democracy) validated it and fixed it in (let us hope conditioned) perpetuity, and the long habit of dumb acceptance has made it seem to subsequent generations as something very like a cosmic law. It is nothing of the sort. It is not implied in the ambiguous word "Democracy" and it is no necessary implement of self-government. *Per contra*, it makes self-government, in any vital, social sense, quite impossible. The condition of partisan, political, parliamentary administration in every country of the facetiously denominated "civilized world", where its uncouth performances have not already wrought its liquidation, settles the question once for all. To be specific, the "state of the Union" today, which is only a culmination of a century-long progress, is the worst in this respect that our history has recorded. The character-quality and the intelligence of our politicians, and the nature of their output, find their parallel only in France. Mr. Nock in *Our Enemy the State* says, in referring to "the almost incredible degradation . . . taking place progressively in the personnel of the State's service", "It is perhaps most conspicuous in the Presidency and Senate, though it goes on *pari passu* elsewhere and throughout. As for the federal House of Representatives, it must be seen to be believed." And again, "Our nominally Republican system is actually built on an imperial model, with our professional politicians standing in the place of the praetorian guards; they meet from time to time, decide what can be 'got away with', and how, and who is to do it; and the electorate votes according to their prescriptions."

In his *Christianity and the Modern State*, one of the latest and best of the great sequence of commentaries on contemporary civilization, Christopher Dawson says:

> Today the world is ripe for renewal. The liberal and humanitarian ideals that inspired the civilization of the last two centuries are dead or dying and there is nothing left to take their place. . . . Thus we may expect not merely the passing of the Liberal-capitalist order, but the End of the Age; a turning-point in world history which will alter the whole character of civilization by a change in its fundamental direction; a turning of the human mind from the circumference to the center, from the emptiness of modern civilization and progress to the vision of spiritual reality which stands all the time looking down on

our ephemeral activities like the snow mountains above the jazz and gigolos of a jerry-built hotel.

Never losing sight of this primal necessity of a new spiritual vision on the part of the body politic, that alone can engender a new and vital philosophy of life, he, like so many other deep students of present conditions, finds in one feature of Italian Fascism an indication of the first practical step that must be taken towards the reorganization of social and political society. Control by politicians, whether capitalist, proletarian, or Communist, is an unmitigated evil and must be totally extirpated. So long as it continues, not only will the modern world continue on its downgrade, but the conditions it produces will inevitably maintain and intensify that mental atmosphere that makes impossible any real change for the better in the spiritual attitude of the people.

This is the Corporative State: that is, the substitution for professional politicians chosen on a partisan or territorial basis, of non-political, non-partisan delegates or representatives by corporations or syndicates made up of voluntary associations of the functional factors in society. This is not the place to enter into an analysis and description of just what this implies. Full information is readily available. The system is now in operation in Italy, Austria, Poland, and other European States, in a more or less experimental stage. As the only sane and logical system now in process, it closely relates itself to life, it must of necessity closely relate itself to reality, and so grow through change and development.

Mr. Dawson makes it quite clear that this is no patented invention of Signor Mussolini. It is explicit and implicit in the encyclicals of several of the more recent Roman Pontiffs, and is indeed a part of Christian doctrine and practice and has been so from time immemorial. As he says, "This organic conception of society involves, on the one hand, a mutual dependence and responsibility between its members, and, on the other, the principles of hierarchy and authority." More than fifty years ago Pope Leo XIII said: "God has established in Civil Society many orders of varying dignity, right, and power, and this to the end that the State, like the Church, should form one body comprising many members, some excelling others in rank and importance, but all alike necessary to one another and solicitous for the common good." And the present Sovereign Pontiff, Pius XI, in his great proclamation, *Quadragesimo Anno*, states explicitly that the one way to achieve social justice and eliminate class war, is the re-creation of a corporative social order through "vocational groups which bind men together; not according to the position they occupy in the labor market, but according to the diverse functions they exercise in society".

Is it impossible that in this idea of the substitution of a functional social organism for an arbitrary political machine, may lie the solution of the problem of the Forgotten Class, its emancipation and redemption, and its re-establishment in power and authority?

Literature and Irresponsibility

ALAN REYNOLDS THOMPSON

ONE OF the main causes for the low estate of literary criticism is that its practitioners must debate first principles continually. A few years ago the Liberals thus took violent issue with the classicists, or Humanists. Now the Marxians take violent issue with the Liberals.

The Liberal critics still constitute the majority, but are somewhat more than formerly upon their defense. One of the most trenchant fighters of this band, Mary M. Colum, recently made a counter attack on both Right and Left. It is the Liberals, she implied, who are the champions of a beleaguered Literature, beset by enemies on both flanks.

> Besides the world war that is being waged on literature by the Communists [she wrote in the October *Forum*] there have been going on for some time a few private wars that may be termed auxiliaries to the main attack. In this country the Humanists were the first obvious aggressors. The late Professor Babbitt in his book on Rousseau managed to hold up to contempt nearly every great writer of the nineteenth century: he did not like their philosophy, so he attacked their work, their minds, and their characters, accusing them of sins like "expansiveness", "lack of decorum", and "lack of the inner check".

Both, to her, are enemies of literature, little as they may love each other, because both are concerned with secondary matters such as opinions and philosophies. "Surely from an artist's point of view," she explains, "the objective of all the forces of literature is not to propagate either philosophy or opinions but to give a complete expression of man in language."

These, you see, are assertions of first principles. These, despite desertions to the Marxian ranks, are still in the main the first principles of the "compact majority" of critics in our country; and while I recognize their superior numbers, and the superior abilities of some of them, I am forced to feel, like Ibsen's Doctor Stockmann, that the majority, in this case, is wrong. And not that alone. I have been gradually forced to the conclusion that among the chief forces destroying the possibility of great literature in our time is just this position maintained by this critical majority. If I am correct, it is ironical that they should pose as defenders of Art.

Mrs. Colum and the rest are inheritors of the Romantic theory of art. This theory arose as rationalization for the Romantic revolt against regimented eighteenth-century pseudo-classicism, and as such was badly needed. But when the Romantics in their zeal went to the opposite extreme from Good Sense and The Rules, they became in their turn dogmatists. They divorced art from responsibility not merely to The Rules, but to Life itself. In ridding literature of ponderous moralizing they rid it of morality, and declared that the realm of art was separate from and superior to the realm of practical affairs. The poet might write *about* life – indeed, he needs must – but he was not accountable *to* life.

The cry of the Romantics was self-expression, and the selves which many among them had to express were extremely eccentric. Mrs. Colum is much more sane than they in calling for "a *complete* expression of man". But she none the less maintains the separation of art from practical life as rigidly as they did. "Life in its working is governed by two codes of spiritual values," she tells us (*Scribner's*, June, 1930). These are the ethical and the aesthetic. "While the ethical values are those by which we govern our lives and discipline our conduct, the second code represents the values by which we appreciate the width and profundity, the richness and intensity of life and human relations." The artist seeks "to live profoundly and intensely".

Now no reasonable person would deny the need of the artist for profound and intense experience, and indeed without it the artist cannot be more than mediocre. It is the *separation* of intensity from discipline, of art from conduct, which the Humanist considers pernicious. It has become not merely a theoretical position but a dogma. It has been dinned into the artist's ears for a hundred years, and he has come to believe unquestioningly that he must not concern himself with the ethical consequences of his deeds as an artist. If he incites to crime as a man by word of mouth, he is of course held accountable: the civil authorities will take care of that. If he incites to crime as an Artist by word of pen, he must not be held accountable. He is above the law.

The inheritors of this dogma are jealous of their privileges and ready to fight for the right to say anything they please. This right, they maintain, is artistic Freedom. They thus correspond to Liberalism in politics. Indeed both they and the political Liberals represent phases of a single intellectual and emotional complex, which can roughly be called the heritage of the French Revolution. If the Communists are right, this tradition of rebellious individualism has about run its course. However that may be, it is all one tradition, of which the characteristic important in this discussion is the dogma of artistic irresponsibility. I shall hereafter for convenience call those who maintain this dogma the Irresponsibles.

In thus grouping together a vast number of writers I do not overlook their many differences. But I am considering them in relation to one fundamental tenet.

In this country the Irresponsibles gain great strength from their claim to use such traditionally honored words as Freedom. The government of the United States arose from the eighteenth-century philosophy of Liberalism, even as did the French Revolution. And anyone who proclaims the cause of Freedom can be sure of American sympathy.

But like all slogans of powerful movements, Freedom is used with the greatest vagueness. What we Americans really want when we demand Freedom is the opportunity to seek and gain our private ends. But we never have permitted *absolute* freedom in this sense, and are more and more being forced by the increasing interdependence of our lives to curtail such freedom as we have permitted. During the last few years we have been forced to recognize the necessity of curbing "rugged individualism" in economic activity, as our forefathers recognized the necessity of curbing political individualism when they instituted the American system of checks and balances.

But until the present the artists and critics of art have been generally unhampered in urging and practicing rugged individualism in their domain. Occasionally they have been attacked or censored, but in the main they have been ignored by practical people because their self-expression interfered but little with the practical self-expression of the rest of the world. As a result the Irresponsibles are still urging that theoretical absolute Freedom, or anarchy, in art, which the wise founders of the Republic knew to be impossible in practical affairs.

It is fair, therefore, to suggest that the Irresponsibles have no presumptive right to the sympathies of those who still adhere to the American tradition. Indeed, Professor Babbitt, in urging the "inner check" of conscience and the balance or proportionateness of the Greek tradition, though he was concerned with personal rather than statutory restraints, might be fairly considered to be in closer sympathy with what is best in the American tradition.

Victor Hugo in 1829 proclaimed what Saintsbury called "the Magna Charta of poetry", but what it would be more accurate to call the Magna Charta of Irresponsible criticism. "There are in poetry no good and no bad subjects, there are only good and bad poets. . . . Everything is a subject." Everything is a subject. There are to be no restrictions upon the self-expression of the artistic genius. He is to have absolute Freedom. And this is still the position of the Irresponsibles.

Next, what is the position of the Humanists? Since Mrs. Colum singled out Professor Babbitt, I shall refer to his position, although he represents in some respects, particularly in his sarcastic polemical style, an extreme rather than the norm.

He urged the need in art as well as in other fields of human activity of restrictions on unlimited expansiveness of the ego. But he did not wish censorship or coercion. The only restrictions that could do good must come from within: they must be the result of active conscience, or what Paul Elmer More first called "the inner check".

A check, please note, not a break. One needs a check-rein on a lively horse to curb his erratic impulses, in order to get somewhere. One does not stop his progress by using the bit; one actually goes farther by means of it.

He also urged "decorum". By decorum he meant a sense of fitness acquired through discipline of one's taste and conduct in emulation of the best and noblest that civilization offers. It was not for him "genteel" Victorianism, or any other timid avoidance of tragic life. Indeed his critics have accused him of being himself indecorous because his manner of self-expression was not genteel. It certainly was not genteel; whether or not it lacked decorum in his sense of the word I feel myself unable to decide. I have always felt it suited to his purpose, but I should be willing to concede the point to his enemies. Whatever the style, the substance of what he said I believe to be sound and wise.

He wished the artist to be a man, and art to be a part of life as well as an expression of life. He condemned the dogma that divorces art from life, and the artist from human responsibility. In doing so he gave many the impression that he condemned wholesale the artists of the modern world. He would no doubt have been more persuasive had he offset his attack upon principles with "appreciation" of excellences. But he never denied the latter; no, not even in Rousseau. (Let anyone who doubts this assertion read the Introduction to *Rousseau and Romanticism.*) He has been continually misinterpreted by reason of the fallacy to which controversialists are prone when their feelings are involved, which is to assume that when a critic attacks one quality, or tendency, in a favored man or cause, he is condeming that man or cause *in toto*.

He did not urge a petty Sunday Schoolish moralism for literature any more than he urged legal censorship. He urged simply that the artist, like all other men of good will, accept responsibility to humanity for his acts. And he agreed with Mrs. Colum and the other Irresponsibles in condemning mere propaganda in creative literature. What he wanted was something far higher and more difficult than reformist agitation. He put his attitude toward moralism in one sentence when he wrote: "To be ethical in the Greek sense is not to preach or to agitate problems, but to see life with imaginative wholeness."

The Humanist agrees with the Communist, and unites with the Communist in opposing the Irresponsibles, to this extent only, that both would hold the artist responsible for the social effect of his deeds. But the Communist wants propaganda whereas the Humanist wants the whole truth. The Communist writer must discipline himself to, or be disciplined by, the outer authority of the Party. The Humanist seeks the inner discipline that results when wisdom controls intensity.

When an intelligent man seeks wisdom sincerely he must be keenly aware of his own limitations. A true Humanism, like true religion, should induce humility. But a Humanist need not be hesitant in declaring the righteousness of seeking wisdom. In so doing he may appear to his enemies as arrogant. But it seems to him that the real arrogance is that of the Irresponsible who sets up his own will as supreme regardless of its consequences.

Nevertheless the Irresponsible declares that the Humanist, by demanding responsibility of the artist, is destroying literature. The Humanist might reply that the most splendid period of literary production in the history of the world – that of ancient Greece of the fifth century – was dominated by the belief, generally accepted and so unquestioned, that artists were men among men, and morally responsible.

But he can do more: he can point, as did Professor Babbitt, to the literature of the last century, which was dominated by the belief in artistic irresponsibility, and show how it has been vitiated and cut off from the fullness of life by that very belief. Babbitt came to much the same conclusion about it as Mrs. Colum does when she asserts that "literature has never had so little influence as at the present day". But he would, contrary to her, assert that it is the very irresponsibility which she professes which has brought it to its low estate.

Of all the forms of literature the drama is probably the most resistant to the dogma of irresponsibility, because the essence of drama is the presentation of men in action, and human acts are inevitably significant to us ethically. Certainly the Romantics failed miserably, though they tried again and again, to write plays of enduring value. And speaking generally, what are the plays of the last century which have approached genuine greatness? Almost none, I believe, except a few by Ibsen. Ibsen was not a propagandist, but he was in his day famous primarily for agitating social problems, and many of these problems have ceased to be burningly important. But in dealing with these Ibsen also dealt with enduring problems of conduct, and he presented these embodied in characters of great vitality, understood with marvelous subtlety and insight. Peer Gynt, for instance, is a great poetic creation, for he is not only an amazingly vital character but also an amazingly suggestive symbol of certain weaknesses and virtues of mankind.

The Irresponsible would tell us that a greater writer needs only intense experience and the power to express it. If that is the case, the great novels of the last century would illustrate it. But the fact is that among many that have the intensity and the expressiveness, there are a few that are also deeply concerned with ethical values, and these are the ones that people turn to long after their authors are dead. We may condemn a novelist for diffuseness and lack of form, and disagree totally with his ethics or his religious tendency. Yet if he is deeply ethical we will set him far above the writer with style and form and clarity of thought, who holds aloof from responsibility. Thus we prefer Dostoievsky to Maupassant or George Moore. One would like great expressiveness and intensity and wisdom all combined, but if one must choose a high degree of intensity with doubtful wisdom on the one hand, or a less degree of intensity and greater wisdom on the other, would one not finally prefer the latter? Perhaps the quiet, unpretentious *Last Chronicle of Barset* will outlive *Crime and Punishment.* Sigrid Undset has both expressiveness and intensity and spiritual depth. If she falls short of greatness, it may be because she sees life as a Catholic rather than as a poet. But her strength is in her earnest sense of responsibility.

I might venture two or three more instances. If we hesitate to praise Thackeray today, or take Dickens as a serious writer, is it not because we feel sentimental evasions of certain ethical issues in their novels? And why do readers return generation after generation to quiet, unassuming, spinsterish Jane Austen? Is it merely for her "style"? Or is it not fundamentally because, within the limitations of her narrow experience, she saw life steadily and sanely?

Verse, finally, has been injured far more than drama and fiction by the dogma of irresponsibility, because the lyric is predominantly subjective and reflective, and mirrors the spiritual health or sickness of its author.

The progress of its fall from its noble heritage may be illustrated by a few cases. Poe paid lip-service to conventional moralism, but actually denied its claims by urging that poetry should be "written solely for the poem's sake", and seeking verbal melody divorced from significance. His was a form of the doctrine of art for art's sake. The French Symbolists maintained this position, and in doing so became progressively more and more introvert, less and less concerned even with communication with others, not to speak of ethical responsibility. The final disintegration of this tradition resulted in writers whom Max Eastman, himself a believer in art for art's sake, none the less aptly calls "poets talking to themselves". Yet the defenders of this school have the arrogance to call their product "pure poetry", and to measure its excellence as art by the degree in which it is meaningless and valueless for life.

Is it any wonder that the world goes on without heeding such poets? Is it any wonder that young people, hungry for ethical direction and spiritual guidance in art, turn even to Communist poets?

Babbitt was not a poet, but he was, I maintain, a champion of great poetry, and fought all his life to develop a spiritual atmosphere in which it might be produced and understood. It is not the Communists, certainly it is not the Humanists, who are today the chief enemies of great poetry, but the Irresponsibles, who deny the artist's concern with the deepest issues of life.

The Humanist is not a Communist, but neither is he a Fascist. He believes in individual freedom — controlled by individual sense of responsibility. He hates tyrants or dictators. But he is sometimes inclined to feel that there is no more tyrannical or dictatorial position than that of the arrogant Irresponsible who declares that the artist *must* divorce his art from life and be an idle singer in an Ivory Tower, while the world reels, it may be downward to destruction, for want of ethical guidance.

REVIEWS

Portrait for Agrarians*

After uncounted dozens of pseudo-sociological works on the American steel-worker, the American mill-hand, the metropolitan American white-collar worker, the American Middletowner, all leaving the reader with a dull sense of the predominant spiritual aridity of urban American life, Mr. Charles Morrow Wilson's new portrait of rural America comes as a refreshment and relief. Mr. Wilson (whose excellent *Backwoods America* was reviewed in The American Review some months ago) is a sociologist only in the sense that he takes society as his subject: he is untrammelled by tenuous statistics and doubly tenuous conclusions from them; he is not a man to seek support for a thesis in the material he works with, or indeed to put forward a thesis at all: he is a portrait painter pure and simple, a first-class reporter, who approaches rural America with sympathetic realism, and finds it surprisingly happy and sound. No one who has travelled about the countryside in recent years, marvelling at the average American countryman's responsibility, sobriety, and refreshing absence of desire to prescribe for other than local ills, can fail to recognize the picture he paints; and most of us will put his well-made book aside with a new sense of hope. For what he shows us is a surprisingly large section of America unimpressed by the surface changes which have been brought about by industrialism, still militantly agrarian, still finding the old philosophy, the old morality, the old responsible relationship of man to man sound and rewarding and true.

---

* ROOTS OF AMERICA *by Charles Morrow Wilson* (FUNK & WAGNALLS. 316 pp. $3.00).

Mr. Wilson's method is to report successively, in some fifteen chapters, on some fifteen characters typical of rural life across the breadth of the country. A practical farmer himself, he speaks with them and for them not as an outsider but as an appreciative colleague in finding the satisfactions of the soil. There is Eben Whitaker, the Vermont farmer who traded his auto for another cow; Amos G. Gallup, the New England auctioneer who made it convincingly clear that country auctions were synonymous not with poor living and bankruptcy, but with provident comfort and well-earned rest; Hastings Williams, the cross-roads storekeeper in Northern New England, who didn't think the auto was going to wreck small-town store keeping, but merely change its emphasis and leave the responsible storekeeper still a vital participant in the productive life of his community, and a useful merchandiser of local home-made goods in the bargain. There is Alf Robinson, the Pennsylvania horse-raiser who knows why horses are coming back, why they can do things that tractors can't and never will; Mr. Missouri, who with the help of the Bible, had developed his own private system of keeping money-crop prices at a level, and had an infinite and satisfying respect for those who had learned to make good use of the land; Ben Irwin, the Southern Missouri hotel-keeper, whose town was so quiet that you could "set right here on this front porch and hear all the notes down at yonder bank a-drawin' interest", but out of a profound knowledge of the history of hotel-keeping knew that some men would always like the kind of fare he gave. There is an Arkansas newspaperman, a hundred-year-old subsistence-community in the same state, a free-lance white-oak timberman from the Ozarks, a plantation owner who puts the case for tenant-farming as an essential apprentice-step toward secure ownership; an itinerant sign painter, an Indian farmer in Taos, a sheepherder in Texas, and half a dozen more.

Mr. Wilson writes well and sincerely (with the exception of an unfortunate introductory chapter where both language and sentiment are strained), in the salty language that comes from handling concrete things. He depicts no idyll of the soil, chooses no especially fortunate characters, indicates no blind hatred of change or cleavage to the old merely because it is old. Of ideas, political or social, he offers almost none: his view of present government activity in the farm field seems confused – on one page he is scornful of benefit payments, on another he praises the government for at last giving the farmer his due (his book, perhaps through no plan of his own, is incidentally illustrated with many excellent photographs supplied by the Resettlement Administration). He sees nothing good in the movement toward regionalism, thinks all rural people essentially the same. And although in one chapter he quotes with approval the words of an Arkansas planter on the need of diversification and subsistence planting, in others he apparently does not see the dangers of too great a concentration on money-crops. Yet without the least prompting from the author, the unprejudiced reader will find in these fifteen random characters, and the way of life they represent, clear evidence of the enduring values which man – man toiling strenuously, but asking no favors and unafraid – can gain from a life carried on where ownership is most frequently direct and responsible; where a man bears an intimate relationship to the source of his livelihood; and where affairs are conducted on a sufficiently small scale so that basic human rights can be well protected not by lawsuits and labor unions but by community opinion and the normal processes of individual human charity.

There are two roads by which one may arrive at an agrarian philosophy: the road of logic, and the road of experience. It is perhaps a misfortune that the ranks of modern agrarians – of those who believe that a sound society can be built only in units reduced to a small and human scale, on a groundwork of individual ownership of the means of production; and that such a basis is most practically expressible in terms of a society in which small farming plays a major part – include so many who have followed the road of logic. They suffer, in putting forward their views, from a certain aloofness from reality. For them Mr. Wilson's book cannot take the place of the kind of observation and experience which has been his own fortune: but it can serve as a partial substitute, and deserves an important place in the increasing library of modern agrarian literature.

MARVIN MCCORD LOWES

William of Ockham*

WILLIAM of Ockham, the English Franciscan who flourished during the first half of the fourteenth century, is usually regarded in historical studies of late Scholastic thought and early modern philosophy as the great transition figure. Almost without exception the historians of philosophy present him as a man of a sceptical turn of mind, as a challenger of the Aristotelian theory of knowledge through his criticisms of various Scholastic views of the universal and of the *species intelligibilis*, and as the father of the modern empirical and experimental viewpoint, sowing the seeds that came to flower in Francis Bacon, Locke, and Hume.

With this orthodox acceptation "comfortably established on the shelves of our libraries" the author of this erudite treatise definitely takes issue. His avowed purpose is to reveal, through a careful exposition and analysis of Ockham's teachings, the philosophical content and "the essentially Aristotelian inspiration" of Ockham's theory of knowledge. Rejecting the portrait of his subject as a negative critic of the Aristotelian elements of the Scholastic tradition "with nothing constructive to offer beyond an empiricism of thoroughly atomic and agnostic character", he contends that William of Ockham was a pure Aristotelian who sought to dislodge the non-Aristotelian elements which in his eyes corrupted Mediaeval interpretations of the works of the Stagirite.

Dr. Moody's effort to prove this revolutionary

*THE LOGIC OF WILLIAM OF OCKHAM *by Ernest A. Moody* (SHEED & WARD. 322 pp. $3.50).

thesis is marked by a methodology of a very high order. He does not aim primarily at passing judgement on Ockham's principles or conclusions. What he seeks is to understand the philosophical basis for those principles or conclusions. Due to the scarcity of texts of Ockham's works this is no easy task. None the less the author refuses to depend on secondary sources, which, by the way, he blames for a great deal of the misunderstanding that has surrounded Ockham's name.

Consequently, next to bringing out a critical edition of Ockham's works, the publication of a detailed analytic exposition of Ockham's theory of science, in his own terms and in function of the discussions in which he was himself engaged, can provide part of the foundation for sound judgements concerning Ockham's Aristotelianism.

This means that the method of historical comparison and contrast is to be used as little as possible. There is to be constant reference to the Aristotelian text in order that Ockham's interpretations should be clarified thereby. Aristotle's *Organon* is to be studied *through the eyes of Ockham*, in his own terms, and by the light of his own principles. In other words, it is not the author's intention to put forward any view of his own in regard to Ockham's Aristotelianism. Rather, he proposes to make Ockham's Aristotle come forth into the limelight. The task is left to the reader of judging whether Ockham's epistemology was Aristotelian, or whether it was more or less so than the Scotist and other Mediaeval interpretations which Ockham rejected. Dr. Moody, despite his effort to be critically detached, would not be human if he did not sometimes help the reader to make up his mind.

In linking the fourteenth-century Ockham with Aristotle our author has to hurdle the obstacle presented by the thirteenth-century Aquinas. He takes that obstacle in his stride with the statement that "among the theories criticized by Ockham it is hard to discover any that were, *in the sense in which he attacked them,* essential to the philosophy of St. Thomas". That qualifying phrase I italicize because it is apt to confuse the issue. Historians have not found it difficult to discover in the works of Ockham a number of attacks on some of the essential principles of the philosophy of Aquinas. The sense in which Ockham made the attack would seem to be of secondary importance.

But our author insists that Ockham's viewpoint in this matter is of primary importance, as indeed it must be if the effort is being made to prove that the fourteenth-century thinker is at heart "a pure Aristotelian". Dr. Moody contends that Ockham found the Peripateticism of his day so subtly and so inextricably colored by Augustinian meanings and Arab interpretations that he considered it necessary to attack those philosophical statements in the forms in which they were presented and understood.

What Ockham made the object of his attack was not Aristotelianism pure and undefiled, it seems, but an alien admixture of Augustinianism and neo-Platonism in Aristotelian dress. Even the very terminology of philosophical discussion had been infected with mixed significance and equivocation, Dr. Moody says. Ockham was therefore driven to employ new modes of expression and to exercise scrupulous care in the unequivocal definition of his terms. He attacked, then, the "un-Aristotelian Aristotelianism" of the philosophical thought of his time.

No tribute is too high to pay to the systematic manner and the patient erudition with which our author sets about the task of upholding this thesis. He begins with a comparative analysis of Ockham's logic of terms, expounds Ockham's commentary on Porphyry's treatise on the five predicables, discusses the problem of universals, analyzes Ockham's treatment of the Aristotelian categories, takes up the question of Ockham's views on forms of complex signification, goes on to an exposition of the logic of demonstration and definition, and finally rounds off the book with a brilliant chapter on what he considers to be Ockham's true place in the history of philosophy.

All through the course of the work Dr. Moody constantly takes issue with those who would condemn Ockham as being anti-Aristotelian. In this respect his footnotes are unusually rich. In one such footnote he explicitly discusses the relationship between Ockham's theory of knowledge and the epistemology of St. Thomas. His conclusion to this discussion is that "it is hard to see how Ockham's theory differs in any important respect from that of Aquinas". Since it is mainly against his theory of knowledge that Ockham's critics have launched their thunderbolts, it may clear the atmosphere if the two theories are briefly compared.

Now, it must not be forgotten that Aquinas never claimed to be "a pure Aristotelian". His system was a synthesis and was offered to the world primarily as philosophic truth and not simply as the correct interpretation of the teachings of the Stagirite, whom

Aquinas professed to follow only "because few or no inconveniences are consequent on his views". But in his theory of knowledge he definitely followed the path marked out by Aristotle.

At the root of the problem of the origin of ideas there lies the difficulty of accounting for the supersensuous object of intellection. Plato held that it had an existence outside of, and independently of, the intellect and that the intellect possessed those ready-made ideas from the beginning. Aristotle disagreed with this view. He held that the intellect is, in the first instance, a faculty for knowing (*intellectus possibilis*) and that there must be something outside it to bring the faculty into actuation. That something is the *phantasma*, which acts transiently upon the intellect and likens it to itself.

The intellect, thus likened to the *phantasma* is informed by a primary cognitional determinant (*species impressa*). But the mind does not know in or through the *phantasma*, which must be purified of particularities in order to be transformed and realized as an intelligible form. This purification is performed by the illuminating action of the active intellect (*intellectus agens*), and the intelligible form, which at one and the same time informs the passive intellect and is a product of the active intellect, is a phase in the immanent activity of the intellect itself. In this latter aspect it becomes a secondary cognitional determinant (*species expressa*), a self-expression of a mind whose nature is to know an object, and, by knowing it, to become that object immaterially. This is moderate realism. It presupposes an object acting transiently and an intellect immanently active.

Now Ockham's position in regard to one aspect of this fundamentally Aristotelian theory of knowledge is thus summed up by Dr. Moody, who confesses that he finds it hard to see how Ockham's theory differs from that of Aquinas:

> The act of understanding is presupposed by any explanation of the act of understanding that we may try to give; hence we might as well define the concept as *the mind recognizing something*, and dispense with the useless (and, if taken literally, dangerous) paraphernalia of active intellect, intellectual "light", and intelligible form, as intermediates between the man actually intelligent and the thing actually understood.

From this it ought to be evident that Ockham, aiming at simplification as a reaction from the excessive formalism of the Scotists, had no great liking for metaphysics.

This, of course, is vehemently denied by Dr. Moody, who says that Ockham was a nominalist in logic just because he was a realist in metaphysics. "What a concept or intention is, considered as a psychological event or state, is as irrelevant to logic and to real science as the question concerning the nature of the ink used in writing." In the Ockhamite view, the concept is merely the act of understanding. And we are further told that what Ockham calls the act of understanding is the act of apprehending, through a concept of first intention, an individual such as can be understood through that concept. This is certainly not what Aquinas calls understanding.

For the thirteenth-century scholastic, so faithfully hewing to the Aristotelian line, understanding is not an act at all but a receptive faculty which when duly determined accomplishes the act of knowing. It is distinguished from the active intellect, which is the principal efficient cause producing the intellectual determinant, (*species intelligibilis*) necessary for the act of recognition. We are therefore puzzled to find the author saying that "the object of understanding, for both Ockham and Aquinas, is that which is individual in nature". And the puzzle is not cleared up for the reader by the author's statement that Ockham's "understanding" was St. Thomas' "act of abstracting the *species intelligibilis* in apprehending the particular". Indeed it is difficult to know precisely how the Ockhamite "understanding" can be equated, without violence, to anything in the Thomist metaphysics of knowing.

Dr. Moody is careful to acquit Ockham of responsibility for many of the philosophical excesses of the Nominalists. It is true that Ockham's terminist theory of the sign, which is set forth adequately in this book, was not fully developed in all its implications by its discoverer. It is equally true that the Ockhamite philosophy contained in germ many doctrines which were developed by others after his time.

From Ockham's insistence upon the primary value of the sign it was an easy step to the doctrine that we know only the sign and not the thing signified. His emphasis on the individual as compared with the universal led naturally to the elimination of the universal altogether from the field of reality. In giving logic a renewal of popularity he prepared the way for the hair-splitting that ultimately marked the downfall of Scholasticism. Of all these charges our author is vividly aware. He endeavors to meet them again and again throughout the book. In the opinion of one reader he has not met them so successfully as he believes.

But the book is a splendid book, worthy of the best traditions of the *philosophia perennis*. Dr. Moody has done for Ockham what no modern critic has done before him, and his splendid work of apologetic must be reckoned with for many a long day. That such a book should have been written by a modern American who was not born into the Scholastic tradition is very significant. That a graduate of Williams in the twentieth century should accept a philosophical brief for a graduate of Oxford of the fourteenth century and should seek to prove the essential Aristotelianism of his client's thought is a proof that the principles of the traditional philosophy are again obtaining a hearing from thinking men.

CHAS. F. RONAYNE

Land of the Free*

A SIGNIFICANT phenomenon of the time is the steadily increasing number of books dealing with the present very comprehensive crisis in human affairs. Many of these are analytical, critical, and essentially destructive, varying in tone from the cynically humorous to the gloomily pessimistic. Some, and their number grows, are constructive and optimistic, verging even on occasion on the idealistic and visionary; all, however, avow the crisis of a great change now in process.

---

* LAND OF THE FREE *by Herbert Agar* (HOUGHTON MIFFLIN. 305 pp. $3.50).

This sequence is a long one. You may, if you like, go back to William Cobbett and Karl Marx, when the modern civilization was first showing itself in material form (its spiritual and moral genesis was far behind this), and so come down in time through Ruskin and William Morris to our own contemporaries. Here the list counts such as Spengler, Belloc, Chesterton, Tawney, Penty, Ortega y Gasset, Berdyaev, Orton, Niebuhr, Mumford, A. J. Nock, to pick only a few of the salient names. To this notable list must be added the latest in time: Herbert Agar, whose *Land of the Free* is now before us.

The sequence of these publications is very notable, and equally so is the fact that they seem to have little effect, if any, on society as a whole. From Cobbett to Mumford all those who are named above have in varying degrees, but with great unanimity, probed deep into modern civilization, isolated its errors, specified its weaknesses, and, in some cases, indicated a way out. In spite of which the world goes on pretty much as before. Will Mr. Agar's book find a wider field of interest and of vital influence?

In a way it deserves this, here in the United States, for it applies directly and specifically to our own national status and condition. The author's thesis is as simple as his approach is incisive and direct. America was, by its founders, intended to be American, and a better thing than the old Europe. Washington, Jefferson, and the Adamses envisaged such a destiny and strove to insure it. When the ideas of Hamilton prevailed, the wrong turning was taken, and state and society followed increasingly Old World models until individuality was lost and we became a poor imitation of the less admirable features of England, economic, industrial, financial, and social. Industrial civilization, big business, finance-capitalism, are the negation of liberty, and liberty is the basis of wholesome life. "We shall have to choose very soon between the tradition of Jefferson and Lincoln and the tradition of Rockefeller and Gould. The former is American Culture. The latter is a debased form of the Civilization of the West."

That portion of America that finds its energizing and controlling force in technocracy, mass production, and "wizard finance" is false to fine tradition and evil in itself; it is also ephemeral and near its end. "In all essentials Chicago and New York are as old as Luxor — and just about as important in the future."

With all his great predecessors, from Cobbett to Chesterton, Mr. Agar realizes that the only basis for liberty is the ownership of the implements of production — land and tools. The man on wage is the un-free man, whether he has the vote or not. If he must depend on another — whether individual, corporation, or state — for his subsistence, and owns in his own name neither land nor tools, his estate is less happy from an economic point of view than the chattel slave of old who at least was assured of a measure of economic security.

Mr. Agar's book is vivacious, epigrammatic, and bright with some of the most engaging (and quite justifiable) invective that has appeared in recent years. He hates hypocrisy, buncombe, and the flatulent self-satisfaction that marked the gilded age from Grant to Hoover. He is devoted to the real "American Idea" which has been submerged for so many generations, and he shamelessly proclaims the necessity of a moral basis for every phase of human life – for politics, business, and finance as well as for personal conduct. He thinks with perfect clarity and fearlessness, and what he writes is like a fresh wind dispelling miasma. His book will be most unpopular with the devotees of the current system of living and other stand-patters.

The illustrations, which are photographs of paintings by various artists employed under the "Public Works of Art Project", are significant and stunning.

RALPH ADAMS CRAM

The Leaderless Generation*

THE lost generation of Maxine Davis's title is not the one named by Gertrude Stein in conversation with Ernest Hemingway, the generation whose gradual alcoholic death was fulfilled in the suicide of Harry Crosby. The generation Miss Davis writes of is the one that came of working age during the present economic depression, and was "lost" in virtue of its being born into a world it had not been taught to expect nor equipped to meet. For over three months, on assignment from *McCall's*, Miss Davis toured the United States in a battered Ford, speaking with the youths she met in service stations, transient camps, CCC camps, welfare centers, and in simple idleness, interviewing various persons dealing with the youthful unemployed in Government agencies, social-service bureaus, and large corporations. She does not make clear her exact itinerary, but in the first part of the book with breezy journalistic style jumps from Arkansas to California to Iowa, meeting in each place some youthful individual who personifies an attitude or a condition fairly common amongst our young people. The second part of the book is given to accounts of the collective activities directed against the depression as it affects youth.

---

* THE LOST GENERATION *by Maxine Davis* (MACMILLAN. 385 pp. $2.50).

Miss Davis finds that, despite little practical experience with work, young men and women are eager for jobs and ready to accept them however little the jobs may accord with immature ideas of ease and remuneration. Strict necessity as well as appetite for work accounts for this eagerness; governmental relief is neither so bountiful nor so widespread that it displaces competitive labor; eagerness for work is a natural corollary of the need for shelter, food, clothes, and a few pleasures. What seems to be implied in stressing this willingness to work (Miss Davis does not often speak directly in her own right) is that neither relief nor the lack of jobs has bred an irresponsible or defeatist mentality. Man is an economic animal only when want has reduced him to almost exclusive concern with his livelihood; and it is hard to believe that the pathetic eagerness for work of American youth which Miss Davis finds so reassuring is other than this debasement. Her inquiries reveal a distressing lack in our youth of faith in anything but the material goods (and that they *are* goods is most arguable) which jobs under a prospering industrialism can provide. Such faith as is needed for a healthy society need not always be religious, but still must be a faith that "plenty" is not the chief end of human life, that there are certain non-material values which the social order must help to make realizable. Such a conception is alien to the bulk of the boys and girls Miss Davis interviewed — with the exception of some young farmers in the Middle West — and this means that the present failure as well as the former partial success of industrial capitalism is helping to form the proletarian mentality.

That these young people should look on politics with little favor and less hope is natural enough, seeing how much corruption, inefficiency, and downright stupidity our unwieldly democratic machine cultivates; but that they turn a jaundiced eye on any form of political action or concerted effort is disheartening. Parallels between the Roman decadence and the present state of the world have been drawn so facilely in a great number of books recently that one is suspicious of them, yet it does not seem far-fetched to see in the gradual relinquishment of both political power and economic independence by the later Roman city-populations something akin to what may well take place when the generation Miss Davis examines has matured. For here are people who have no belief in their ability to secure good government nor faith in any leaders to provide it for them and look to a reluctantly granted wage for the only things they really want — bread and movies: here, in other words, are people rapidly acquiring the souls of slaves.

This very supineness pleases Miss Davis; it eliminates for her that dread bogey of fascism. It is true that at times she fears the bogey will raise its head if want grows wider and some demagogue arrives to promise milk and honey and endless movies (which, at any rate, were not the things promised by Hitler and Mussolini). But then by some private logic she decides that apathy will save from destruction what the Liberty League calls fundamental American institutions, and satisfies herself that the cosmetics of better employment agencies, more settlement workers who are not "frigid old maids", and more specialized schooling will counteract the stench and growth of the cancer in our social body. Mr. Hearst's bogey of communism concerns Miss Davis hardly at all; the advertised radicalism of our universities, she finds, comes from a misconception based on identifying the utterances of a few very vocal intellectuals with the opinion of the student body as a whole. Reflection would show that communism does not need a universal enthusiasm for the tenets of Marx in order to come to power; it needs only the active cooperation of a body of intelligent enthusiasts, the apathy of the propertyless masses, and a state of acute crisis. Such an "only" may indeed seem a large one; but we have the seeds of it and they do not lie dormant.

The demagogue who has been announced at the wailing wall of the Liberal press as the Apocalyptic beast with seven heads and ten horns will surely appear in the near future, and, speaking from the orientation of Miss Davis's book, he will come to devour the young. We have this last on the testimony of events in post-War Europe, and all those who are concerned that the generation of which Miss Davis writes should not be forever lost must give thought to whether this leader will in truth be the beast or whether, since he is an image of men's minds, opinions shall have been formed which will make him what those who welcome him really need. "No institution is better than the public it serves," says Miss Davis (rather contradictorily, in view of her faith in uplift agencies); and if we are to do away with the threat of a fascism which is, as the communists say, "an armed maintenance of the *status quo*", we shall not get far by multiplying all the social service devices which are not the cures but the symptoms of a sick society.

The lost generation must be helped to find its birthright in other ways. Even if the present industrial system could be made to work smoothly, small good would be accomplished. The rootlessness, the weariness, the apathy which Miss Davis saw rife amongst our youth would only be temporarily halted by the instituting of new ways of dividing labor; new ways of spreading methods of education which turn out romantic savages equipped with all the destructive potentialities of scientific knowledge; new ways of complicating our insanely technocratic civilization. "Remember – this army moving with the shuffling feet of the faithless is our future – and mayhap our retribution." Her book is a good guide to those who would see these youths as they are today, even though it is no guide for them as they should be tomorrow.

GEOFFREY STONE

The Noble Savage as Novelist*

THE foremost exemplars of "genius" in the literary world at the moment are Thomas Wolfe and William Saroyan. The fame of neither of them is dependent on his mastery of his chosen art, but rather on the accidents of his character, on that irreducible minimum of personality which marks off every man from

* THE STORY OF A NOVEL *by Thomas Wolfe* (SCRIBNER'S. 93 pp. $1.50).

his fellows. After reading Mr. Wolfe or Mr. Saroyan, one is not filled with admiration at the ever-surprising feat of the great craftsman's imposing form and significance on his recalcitrant material; the most one can do is to exclaim "How like Wolfe – or Saroyan!" So, for those who practise that kind of criticism which asks not what a man has done but how well he has done it, these authors are never found wanting, for they are dedicated to the task of expressing themselves, and as long as they write, they perforce express themselves.

The Story of a Novel is the biography of Mr. Wolfe's as yet unfinished autobiography, of which two volumes, *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River*, have appeared. Mr. Wolfe is also the author of a book of short stories, *From Death to Morning*, which presumably consists of sections his editor discarded from his second novel. In view of this scanty output, there may seem to be something pretentious in issuing *The Story of a Novel*; but it is in fact perfectly consistent with the position Mr. Wolfe occupies, for there is no essential difference in his attitude and subject when he is writing about how he wrote his novel and when he is writing that novel. Mr. Wolfe, in common with many another modern writer, is greatly concerned with time, that is, he wishes to express the peculiar spirit of the age; and in that he has been successful. That this expression will speak eloquently to future ages is doubtful, since future ages are reluctant to read old works which add dullness and turgidity to length; his success means that the present age has found someone who personifies its ideal of the writer of genius.

Critics as fundamentally divergent as Irving Babbitt and Edmund Wilson have stressed the fact that for an understanding of modern literature one must look to its genesis in the Romantic Revival, and it is to be expected that a writer who embodies the contemporary ideal of genius will bear the familiar earmarks of romanticism. These marks Mr. Wolfe does bear; he is in the style of Berlioz and Byron, Werther and Atala, though clothed in good coarse homespun. Romantic genius is characterized by what Frederick Myers called the "subliminal uprush"; the romantic genius simply can't help it, he's made that way, and that's why his work is as it is. Certainly, no genius creates his genius, but he does create his work, and Mr. Wolfe's way of creating is to write until Scribner's editor says with "quiet finality" that his book is finished.

Eugene Gant, the hero of *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River*, it will be recalled, had the obsession with "Amount and Number" Mr. Wolfe confesses to. His obsession united with Mr. Wolfe's (if there is any distinction to be made) resulted in a proliferation of pointless descriptions and dialogues, apostrophes to feminine America and masculine railroad trains (it will be a Viennese holiday when the psychoanalysts begin searching for unwitting *doubles entendres* in Mr. Wolfe's books), and adolescent introspection. This means that Mr. Wolfe was trying, and is evidently still trying, to get life, not art, into his books. He has admitted as much himself, saying he could only meet his problem squarely "not with reason but with life"; and art is a product of reason. Life is ours till we die, and so Mr. Wolfe, who had taken to living with his pen, had to be informed by his publisher that his book was finished. His confession of this is surely one of the most naïve in the annals of the literature, yet is not an unexpected one, for, creating as he does, no one could suppose that Mr. Wolfe would himself wield the abhorrèd shears. Thus Mr. Wolfe's work is a sort of a segment out of a continuous stream; it is a fragment. Works whose size are as bulky a result of their striving for completeness as are Mr. Wolfe's may seem big fragments indeed; but the essence of the fragmentary is incompleteness, not size. It is only by reference to Mr. Wolfe that his novels surrender the meaning that should have been embodied in them through art; behind the massiveness of the books, stands the far more massive accretion of their author's experience: the material of the novels has, ultimately, no justification other than that it has been witnessed or undergone by Mr. Wolfe.

What, then, is the explanation of the manner in which these books have been received? Mr. Wolfe is, as it were, an historical throwback, a contemporary example of the hearty ancestors of the tired petulant novelists who surround him. Those whom the latter have infected see in Mr. Wolfe their own disease justified by its glorious possibilities: this sound, this fury differs only in volume, not quality, from the feeble murmur in their own breasts. He is that Noble Savage from whose high estate they have fallen but have never ceased to yearn for.

LAUREN BROWN